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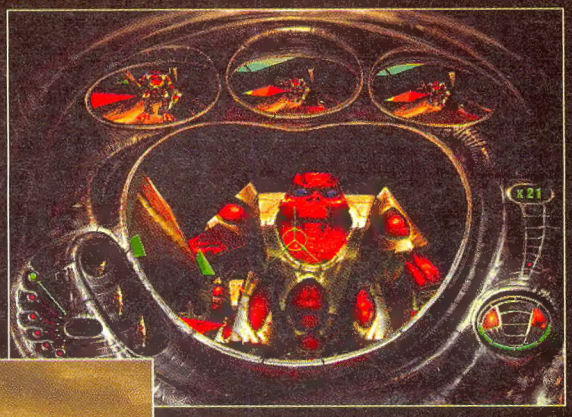

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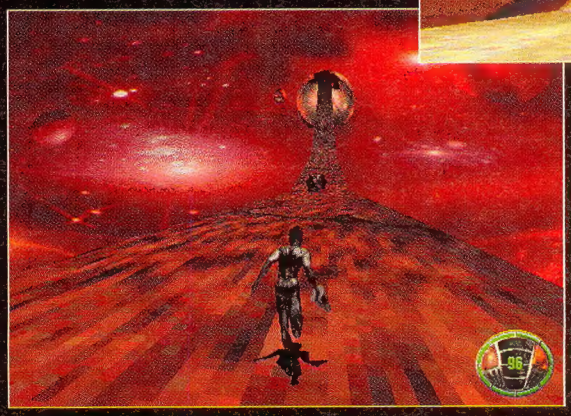

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PC CD-ROM

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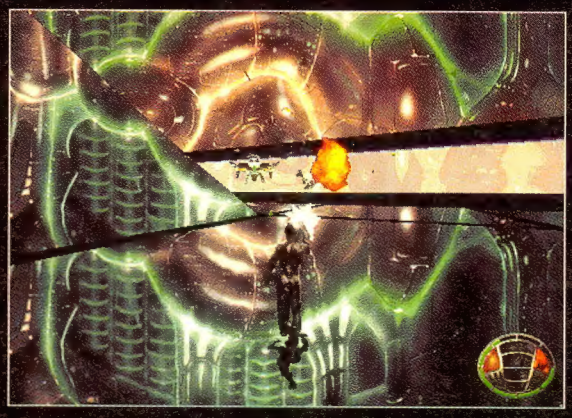

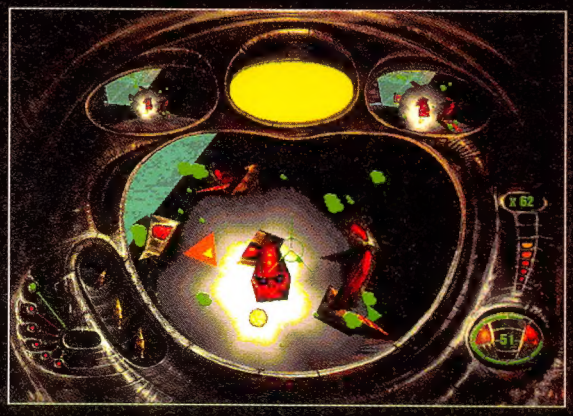

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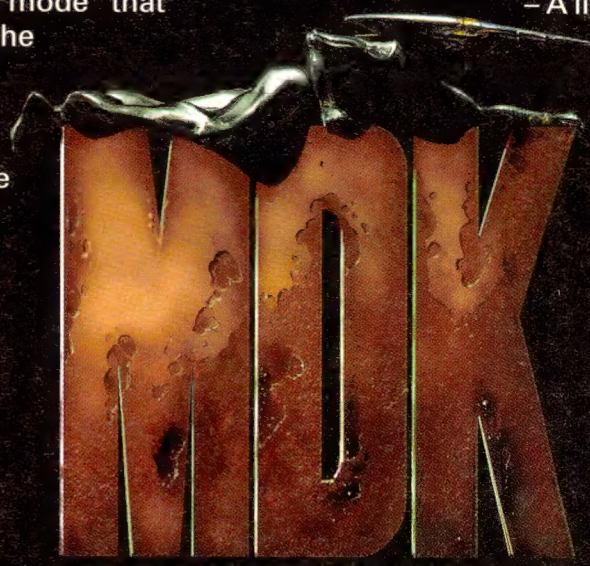

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contents

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

news & first looks

16 **Psychedelic fun for all**
Microsoft want to rule the world. With The Internet Gaming Zone, Baseball 3D, Close Combat 2, CART Precision Racing and Age of Empires, they may be on their way.

22 **SSI's year of strategy**

26 **Virgin spreads its wings**

30 **"Fewer, better games"**

34 **TalonSoft opens new fronts**

features

40 **Flying Nightmares 2** – *Steve Bauman*
It's a flight simulator. It's a real-time wargame. It slices. It dices. It's Eidos' Fliying Nightmares 2.

44 **Fallout** – *Cindy Yans*
Interplay gets post-nuclear without a GURPS license, but with a still superb-looking CRPG.

52 **Outpost 2.0** – *Scott Udell*
Dyanmix' Patrick Cook answers the obvious question. Why?

previews

56 **Pacific General** – *Scott Udell*

58 **Carmageddon** – *Steve Bauman*

60 **Imperialism** – *Scott Udell*

64 **Extreme Assault** – *Peter Smith*

over the net

68 **Lucky number 13** – *Steve Bauman*

strategy

70 **Command Post** – *Scott Udell*

72 **On War** – *Mike Robel*

74 **Reviews**
MicroProse finally gets its Magic: The Gathering out the door. Is it better than Acclaim's? Also reviewed: Enemy Nations, Fallen Haven, Krush, Kill, N' Destroy, Leningrad 2.0, Chess Wars and Star Command.

action

88 **Cheat Thrills** – *Steve Bauman*

90 **Reviews**
Feel the funk with Interstate '76. Also reviewed: Pod, Scourge of Armagon, The Divide: Enemies Within and XS.

adventure

94 **Road to Nowhere** – *Cindy Yans*

100 **Boots of Re** – *Andy Backer*

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102 **Reviews**
Jordan Mechner does it again with The Last Express. Also reviewed: The Space Bar, The Arrival, Ark of Time and Golden Gate.

106 **Diablo Tips Part Two** – *Samuel Brown Baker II*

simulations

108 **The Hangar** – *Steve Wartofsky*

110 **Air Combat Advisor** – *Ben Chiu*

112 **Reviews**
*i*M1A2. Finally, a tank game to replace your aging copy of M1 Tank Platoon.

114 **Jetfighter 3 Tips** – *Jim Pedicord*

sportswire

116 **Reviews**
Jack's back in Jack Nicklaus 4.

hardware

118 **Flying beyond the speed of sound** – *Steve Bauman*

etc

14 **Upfront** – *Steve Wartofsky*

120 **Rebound**

cd demos

Blood
WAR, Inc.
Krush, Kill N' Destroy
S.C.A.R.A.B
MDK (all new!)
FPS: Mini-Golf
FPS: Football Pro '97
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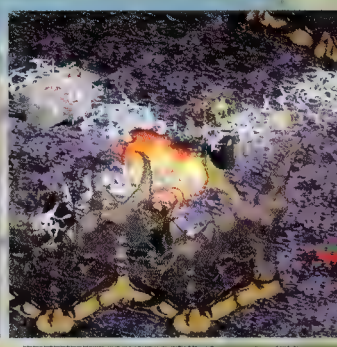

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Classic	★★★★★
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Good	★★★☆☆
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Why?	★☆☆☆☆

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Windows 3.1

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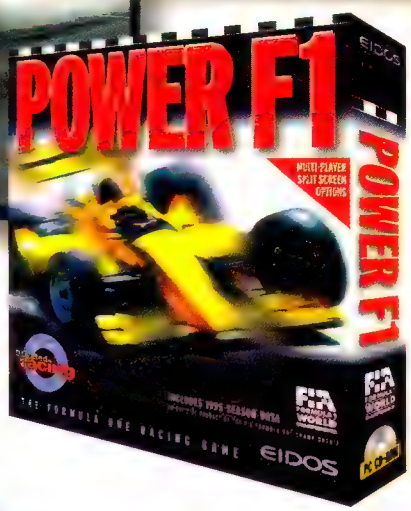

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Off to the races

Things have been exciting at this magazine ever since my earliest affiliation with it, when it started publication in the US in 1991. As a writer back then, I had my first opportunity to write independently about the things that really mattered to me in computer gaming, to attend the trade shows where the birth of this now giant industry was being revealed, and to gain my earliest experiences with the kinds of audience and subject issues which were particular to *Strategy Plus*. Back then, we were known as a quirky publication with an unusual "British" sense of humor (the joke behind the scenes was that some of that apparently British humor was being constructed by Americans, oh well, and so it always goes), and a wildcat approach to the industry.

In 1992 I became Editor of the magazine. At that point our internal staff consisted of just myself, Jim Romanoff, the graphics and layout genius, and Greg Sauter, the ad guy. The industry was hectic enough to make trying to cover it all quite a challenge even at that point, but it was nothing like it has become; we still had the room, the time and the space to try out lots of different things, some of which worked, some of which didn't. We were quite conservative (as were most magazines then) about layout issues, opting to keep things simple both because of aesthetic preference and because the resources weren't there at that point to go hog-wild. We did Designers' Notes, company profiles, interviews and dual alternate reviews of featured games, among other things (Brenda Garneau, a real stalwart, even attempted contact with Al Gore at the White House to set up an interview…! We're still hoping…). I drew upon people I knew from regular conversation in CompuServe's online forums, to be our outside writers; many became fast friends quickly in the pressure-cooker environment of magazine production (many also had early experience with what was probably the world's first online computer gaming magazine, *The Electronic Gamer*, managed ably by the CompuServe Gamers Forum Chief SysOp, "Nightshift." *TEG* should be remembered as a truly pioneering effort in this industry; it never got the credit I thought it deserved). They all did (mostly) excellent work.

Things progressed rapidly from there, and *Computer Games Strategy Plus* grew during my watch into the full-scale, professional and commercially viable publication it is today, with a crack editorial staff, professional circulation and advertising management, a layout and graphics design *department*, a related web site and firm bonds cemented with software publishing companies around the world.

It's been a long time at the helm, and it's passed all too quickly, too. Now it's time to move on: I've recently been offered the exciting dream opportunity to join Interactive Magic as a Project Manager, an opportunity to do something new which I simply couldn't pass up. It will be hard work, there will be dreary parts just as there are in any job (even one as exciting as Editor of a computer gaming magazine), but I'm very much looking forward to being able to help there. As has always been the case in my work with the magazine, what I love most is helping creative people focus and get their ideas across clearly. When those ideas are games, well, so much the better!

I will miss my current team and publisher – we work together well under pressure, something that's nearly impossible to achieve in any context – but I also have confidence like I've never had before in the magazine's history that the magazine will thrive, and continue to grow, and prosper. Great challenges and exciting times ahead for us all.

I wish my team-mates the best, and want to say to everyone I've worked with in the industry so far from my Editor's post – send screenshots, on CD, in IBM format. No, seriously, thanks for all your help and your efforts to get amazing amounts of work done quickly, so that we at the magazine have been able to put together solid issues each month.

And to you, the magazine's audience, the ones we all ultimately care about the most (and believe me, for the majority out there in the industry, not just because of the bottom line): stay involved. Expect the best. Have patience with creativity and innovation. Be flexible. Have fun, and scream blue bloody murder when you're frustrated (that's how we learn). You're what it's all about, you keep us honest, and the best people working in the industry will always be the ones paying most active attention to you.

Take Care.

–Steve Wartofsky, Editor

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Microsoft holds Gamestock 97–beware the brown acid

WHEN MICROSOFT STARTED GETTING serious about the game industry, few gamers took notice. Outside of the venerable *Flight Simulator*, they don't have much of a track record. For every *Close Combat*, there seemed to be a *Deadly Tide* or an *NBA Full Court Press*. However, a surprisingly low-key Microsoft started to sign up major talents, such as Texas-based Ensemble Studios, and we're finally starting to see the fruits of those deals.

Microsoft held "Gamestock 97" at their campus in Redmond, Washington to show off their upcoming lineup, and it was indeed an impressive showcase. Considering their record of first releases (anyone want to buy a copy of Windows 1.0?), Microsoft's lineup for 1997 could be accurately called "Microsoft Goes Gaming 2.0" Companies that ignore the now-awakening giant do so at their own peril.

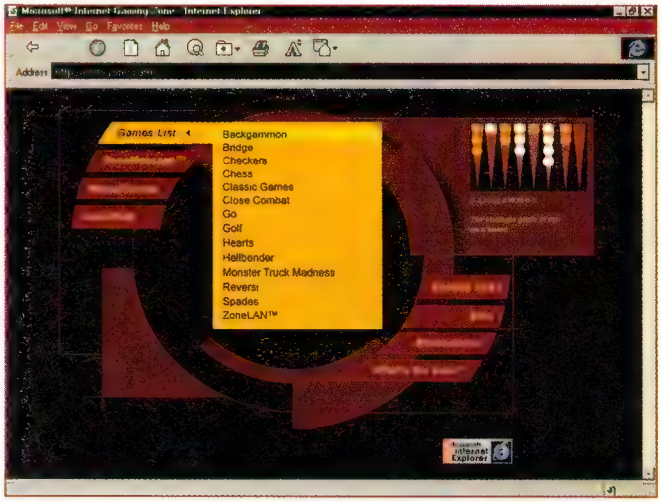
In the Zone

"Microsoft is an Internet company" has been the mantra for the entire company for the past couple of years, so it should come as no surprise that the *Internet Gaming Zone* (www.zone.com) figures prominently in their plans. In the past year, the service has grown from 15,000 users to over 200,000. The current plan is to continue offering free matchmaking and chat services for boxed Microsoft products, such as *Close Combat* and *Monster Truck Madness* and all of the games in this article.

Peering in on people playing Bridge over the Zone

Coming this summer will be a host of new features, like *ZoneMessage* for easier matchmaking, new advanced avatars for onscreen characters, and *ZoneLAN*, an IPX to TCP/IP emulator that will allow IPX multiplayer games to be played over the Internet. The bigger news is that Microsoft has signed deals with Hasbro Interactive, DWANGO and VR-1. Hasbro will be offering *Monopoly*, *Risk*, *Battleship* and *Scrabble* on the *Zone*. DWANGO will use the *Zone*'s matchmaking service to link players over the DWANGO network (at its normal hourly rate).

The deal with VR-1 has resulted in *Microsoft Fighter Ace*, an online WWII flight simulator. Gamers will be able to fly 12 different aircraft from the United States, Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union. They're trying to build an environment with multiple skill levels to keep newbies from getting killed immediately by veterans. Visually speaking, the game has terrific graphics, by far the best of any of the competitive online offerings. Synergy with the *Zone* service will give particularly good pilots additional graphics for their online avatars, such as bomber jackets with custom patches.



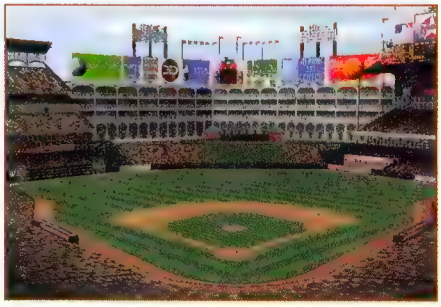
How 'bout a game of Backgammon on the newly re-designed Zone

Fighter Ace introduces another new *Zone* feature–it's their first "made-for-medium" premium game. For a fee, gamers can play this game, and participate in online tournaments (a *Golf 3.0* tournament is already scheduled, with sponsorship from *Golf Digest* magazine and AT&T). The fee structure is interesting. Users can pay a monthly flat rate or buy daily "tickets" that will allow them to play the premium products for a 24-hour period. The actual pricing has yet to be determined, though Steve Murch (product unit manager for the *Zone*) said they'd be "movie-like" in cost (as in, the cost of going to the movies, not making one).

On the 3D field

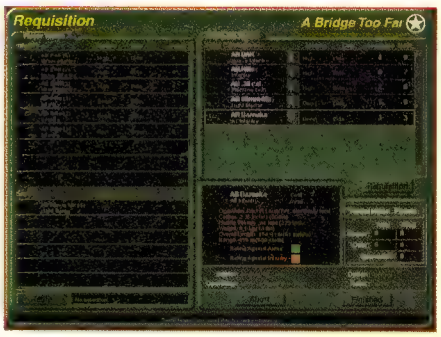
In what is likely to be a common trend in late 1997, *Microsoft Baseball 3D* requires a 3D accelerator, making the visuals look fabulous. An arcade rather than managerial simulation of America's pastime, the game is being developed by WizBang! Software, who created *HyperBlade* for Activision. Like that game, it uses a scripting AI language called ADLIB for managerial decisions and for the control of players on the field.

Baseball 3D is a physics-based game, so there are no fixed paths for balls as they fly off the bat. Calculations are made based on velocity, gravity, ball spin and wind resistance to avoid the repetitive paths fly balls tend to take in other products. Visually speaking, the game is resplendent in 16-bit colored high-resolution graphics, and motion capture has been used for smooth animation. Certain top players on each team will have their faces mapped on the polygonal figures.



On the field at the Ballpark in Arlington in Baseball 3D

Additional features include 3D ambient sound, support for force-feedback devices, multiplayer support over the *Zone* and, in keeping with the arcade feel of the game, combination moves to allow difficult throws, acrobatic catches, massive home runs that would make Albert Belle throw jealous tantrums, plus more. Stat-heads will find enough numbers to keep them interested, and the actual



New to Close Combat 2, you can equip soldiers before heading into battle

High above the field in Kansas City in Baseball 3D

player ratings will be in *Access* database format, so people can tweak them to their heart's content. Both Major League licenses are in place, all stadiums, including the new ones in Tampa and Phoenix, are included, and stats will be updated on the Internet. Look for the game to be on shelves before the fall classic.

Racing with the giants

Monster Truck Madness developer Terminal Reality surprised the press corps at the show with their new game, *CART Precision Racing*, a hardcore Indy car racing simulation. Though the game wasn't available to drive, it was there to look at. Running on a 3Dfx-equipped Pentium, it looked incredible, with amazingly detailed cars and track-side objects. As an aside, TRI's Mark Randel and Greg Seehusen said, "Wait until you see the Klamath processor with AGP from Intel. It will be the biggest leap ever in graphics on the PC." They have a 233MHz version of the chip with software AGP (the hardware isn't available yet), and they're already getting better frame-rates with *CART* than with an MMX Pentium and 3Dfx accelerator. For those who don't know what AGP is, it stands for Advanced Graphics Port, and it's a new ultra-high-speed graphics port.

Back to *CART Precision Racing*. In racing school, you're taught to look way down the track (consider the fact you could be traveling at speeds greater than 200 MPH), so *CART Precision Racing* adds a new cockpit view that simulates this. It's a virtual cockpit that moves left or right, depending on the direction the track is moving. It will be an option if it proves to be too confusing to the driver, but like Papyrus' new view for *Grand Prix Legends*, it's good to see people doing some interesting things with the tried-and-true vehicle viewpoint.

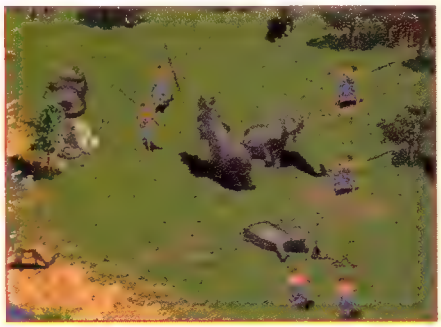
The simulation engine is based on the one from *Monster Truck Madness*, and Seehusen, an ex-aerospace engineer, has been spending time with fellow propeller heads from the PacWest CART team. He claims the feel will be incredibly accurate, saying that "it will take the next step in simulation fidelity." When we get to take a test drive, we'll be sure to let you know if he's telling the truth.

A bridge to the wargamers

You stormed the beaches of Normandy in *Close Combat*, and now in *Close Combat 2: A Bridge Too Far* you'll experience "death from above" as you invade Holland during Operation Market Garden. Like the book licensed for the game (the movie was too expensive), this real-time wargame simulates the battles to control five strategic bridges. Like the first game in the series, a sophisticated psychological model is used to simulate actual battle conditions and their effect on the soldiers.

According to Keith Zabalaoui of developer Atomic Games, a lot of user feedback went into the new game. "We've improved the tactical model, added a resource allocation layer and improved the overall flow of battle." Another suggestion was for a the ability to issue orders to your troops before the commencement of battle, which has also been implemented.

Troops can now sneak, crawling on their bellies until they've reached their locations. There are now buildings of multiple stories, and elevation effects are taken into consideration. Additional features include the ability to control the Germans or the Allies, multiplayer play and a campaign game where you'll be fighting multiple battles on the same maps, where soldier morale and status, as well as map damage, is carried over.



Note the incredible unit detail in Age of Empires

Also new to the sequel are a myriad of visual and interface improvements, including sharper map graphics in 16-bit color, larger units, faster scrolling (the biggest complaint with the original), and for Windows 95 users, right-mouse button support. There are three zoom levels, and unlike the original there are separate graphics for each, so you won't see any of that annoying pixelization. A new near-full-screen mode lets you see more of the battle, and there are additional methods of determining your troop's statistics.

With versions for Windows 95, NT 4.0 and the Power Macintosh, you'll be helping Microsoft win the war this fall.

Close Combat 2: A Bridge Too Far has better looking maps with faster scrolling

A golden age of gaming

Microsoft heads right to the top of the real-time strategy class with Ensemble Studios' *Age of Empires*, by far the most impressive of the glut of *Clone & Conquer* games. This is no clone; *Age of Empires* is being co-designed by Bruce Shelley, who gamers may remember as the co-designer, with Sid Meier, of *Railroad Tycoon* and *Civilization*. With those two products topping most gamers' lists of all-time favorites, the anticipation for *Age of Empires* is sky-high; based on some time spent with the game, it may live up to it.

The quick one-sentence summary of *Age of Empires* would be "*Civilization* crossed with *Command & Conquer*." Taking the best aspects of both designs, you can control any one of 12 ancient civilizations, from the militaristic Assyrians to the philosophical

Egyptians. Each of the cultures has strengths and weaknesses, giving the gamer a completely different gameplay experience with each one. In many scenarios you start in the stone age and, depending on the civilization chosen, will have different winning conditions. You'll have to build up your village, gather resources and research new technologies. Winning conditions can vary from all-out conquering of your opponents to economic domination through the good old tried and true "explore the map before everyone else."

Multiplayer gaming should prove a hit with the *Command & Conquer* crowd, but for the solo player there are campaigns of linked scenarios, individual scenarios, a scenario editor and a random map and scenario generator. While the game, like *Civilization*, isn't completely tied to history, some of the scenarios follow such historical events and people as the Trojan War, Jason and the Argonauts and Alexander the Great.

The interface is similar to *Warcraft II*; select units, and right-click on the target object. The nature of the chosen object will determine what you do to it by selecting. If it's a tree, you'll start to collect wood. If it's gold, you'll mine. If it's an animal, you'll hunt. If it's the enemy, it's fighting time. If it gets to that point, you'll go into battle with some of the most beautifully animated units in strategy gaming. Command entire armies of archers, cavalry (you have to see the collapsing horses to believe them), boats, catapults, elephants and lord knows what else.

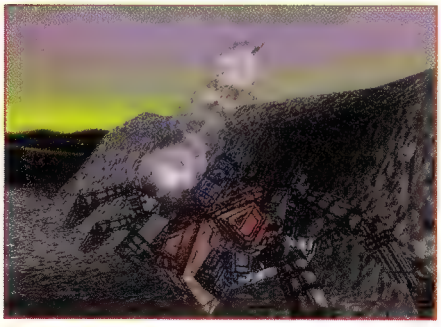
Just to show the potential and interest in *Age of Empires*, two of the people getting the biggest kick out of playing it at Gamestock were Chris Roberts and Tony Zurovek, formerly of Origin (where they produced *Wing Commander* and *Crusader* respectively), both now with Microsoft developer Digital Anvil. They, and we, were lucky to get to play it at this stage. You'll have to wait until the fall. This game looks so promising, you may find yourself hoping for a quick end to summer.

Two armies square off across a river in the real-time strategy game Age of Empires

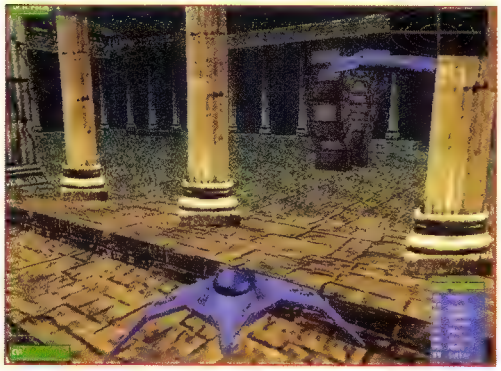
Age of Empires will ship with a full-featured editor

It doesn't stop there

Other games that Microsoft will be releasing in 1997 include *The Condemned*, a robot-based 3D shooter with the old battle-tested "futuristic game show" premise. You're an inmate who drives around mechanized vehicles against fellow inmates for the entertainment of the unwashed masses. There are 36 environments for your destroying pleasure. Vehicles can be customized with 50 weapons and features like spider legs. The visuals are texture mapped, with support for 3D cards, and the music is by Seattle natives Alice in Chains.



The Condemned



Critical Depth

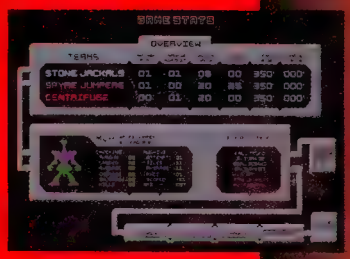
Critical Depth is another 3D shooter, only this one is all wet – that is, it's an underwater action game. Developed by SingleTrac, who created *Twisted Metal*, *WarHawk* and *Jet Moto* for the Sony PlayStation, the game is a treasure hunt, where players compete with one another to find mysterious beacons which have appeared in the ocean's depths. *Critical Depth*, like *The Condemned*, supports multiplayer play. Finally, Alexey Pajitnov, of *Tetris* fame, brings you *Microsoft Entertainment Pack: The Puzzle Collection*, a collection of, believe it or not, puzzles.

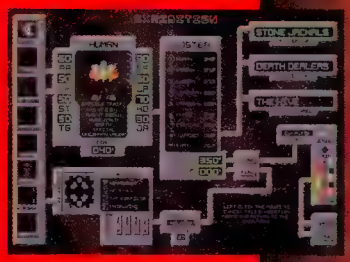
Entertainment Pack: The Puzzle Collection

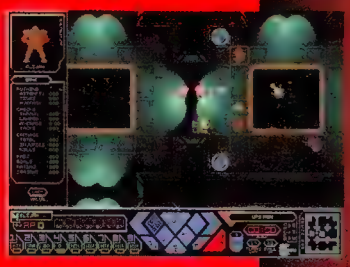
Overall, this is easily Microsoft's most impressive lineup; if everything pans out, 1997 could be a breakout year for the Windows folks. That sound you're hearing are the chattering teeth of nervous executives throughout the industry. Microsoft's finally ready to play. *–Steve Bauman*

Got the B.A.L.L.s to Play?

"Everything about Crush! Deluxe seems right on every level"
Online Gaming Review, March '97







Crush is an exciting turn-based strategy sport game, of mayhem and carnage, set far into the future. Eight different alien life forms battle humans through labyrinth-like arenas, in a frantic search for the B.A.L.L. (Bionic Augmented Lower Life form). The first team to find the B.A.L.L. and reach the goal, wins! If your idea of fun is bone-crunching checks and raging battles for possession, then look no further, the season is open!

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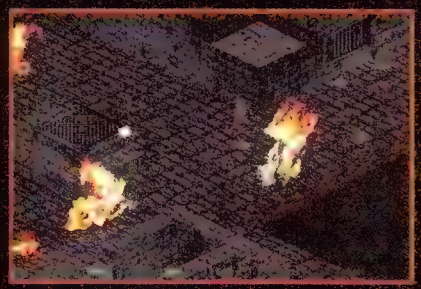

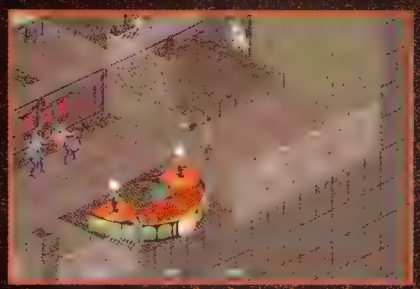

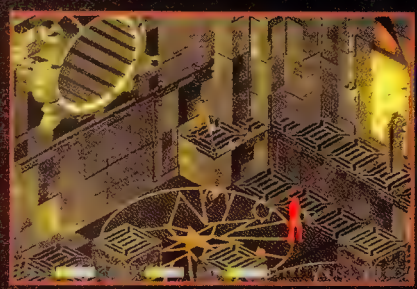

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SSI's year of strategy

But simulations and role-playing gaming are not forgotten

ON EXAMINING A PRODUCT RELEASE schedule, it looks like 1997 is going to be the year of war/strategy gaming for SSI. In addition to *Pacific General* and *Imperialism* (see previews on pages 56 and 60), one can count at least five other strategy or wargame titles, with a number of scenario disks as well. This is not to say, though, that other categories have been dropped completely.

Su-27 Mission Disk

While we normally wouldn't devote much space in the news to a mission disk, it sounds like the one coming for *Su-27* is significant enough to warrant the coverage. In addition to the upgrade to version 1.5, the CD will contain *150* new missions, an "Automatic Mission Generator," and an online training manual. On the technology side the game will now support 16 players over LANs, have enhanced graphics with Gouraud shading on the objects, and work with Direct3D compatible 3D accelerator cards.

The Ardennes Offensive

Perhaps the biggest title for the first half of '97 is officially called *Decisive Battles of World War II: The Ardennes Offensive*. Better known to wargamers as *The Last Blitzkrieg* (and, for long-enough to get into our last issue, as *Ardennenkrieg*), *The Ardennes Offensive* is the long-awaited Battle of the Bulge game designed by SSG, the war and strategy game company from Australia that's been around almost as long as SSI.

Definitely a title for the more hard-core wargamer, *Ardennes Offensive* is generally operational in scale, placing "a premium on efficient divisional command." At press time the game was scheduled to ship with the full Bulge campaign and five scenarios, playable from either side (some scenarios may have a British turn as well). Aside from your basic movement and combat, supply is factored in and engineering will play an important role. Some of the options SSI highlights are the *Wehrmacht* special operations *Greif* teams (better know the difference between "gas" and "petrol"), variable control of British units, and the possibility that German units may be reassigned–without notice. Other "extras" include a battle replay feature, an encyclopedia, on-screen help, and a full tutorial.

The game is now for Windows 95, and uses it to provide networking support; while SSI says multiplayer will be achievable via e-mail, modem, or network, the Windows 95 networking option in the beta includes TCP/IP support, so Internet play is at least theoretically possible. A minimum system for the game will be a 90MHz Pentium with 8MB of RAM, although 12MB will be required for the hi-res maps. Current plans call for an early Summer ship date, and SSG is planning on further titles for the *Decisive Battles of World War II* series.

Breech Loading Rifle
Your Excellency:
The invention of the breech loading rifle enables our new troops to destroy recruit wielding foes.

Imperialism

An early example of the detail we can expect to see in Panzer General II

The Ardennes Offensive: Sending the greif special operations teams into the American rear

Detailed combat information in The Ardennes Offensive

Down the road

Quite a few other titles are planned for release late this year or early next; while there's little or no information on these beyond their titles, we can identify one common trend: sequels. All these games are follow-ons to games that, if not outright hits, had some sort of following. On the strategy side we'll see *Warhammer II: Dark Omen* and *War Wind II*. For wargames, we'll see *Panzer General II* and perhaps *Steel Panthers III: Tank Commander* (see our January '97 issue). The primary sim planned for release during this period is of *Su-27 Flanker 2.0*; while we have few details, producer Steve Whittle says "Version 2.0 will include texture-mapped terrain at multiple altitudes and resolutions" while retaining *Su-27*'s extremely realistic flight model. *Buccaneer*, a game SSI is calling an RPG with some strategy elements, will be shipping for Windows 95 this Fall as well. Not a hard-core sailing wargame (*that* title was *Ship of the Line*, and it has either been pushed to'98 or canceled depending on who you talk to at SSI), *Buccaneer* lets you take on the role of a captain sailing the High Seas, complete with ship boardings, intrigue in port, and more general swashbuckling.

And of course, this is probably not all that SSI has up their product development sleeves, but unfortunately we're going to have to wait until later in the year before they start to talk about next year's goodies. *–Scott Udell*

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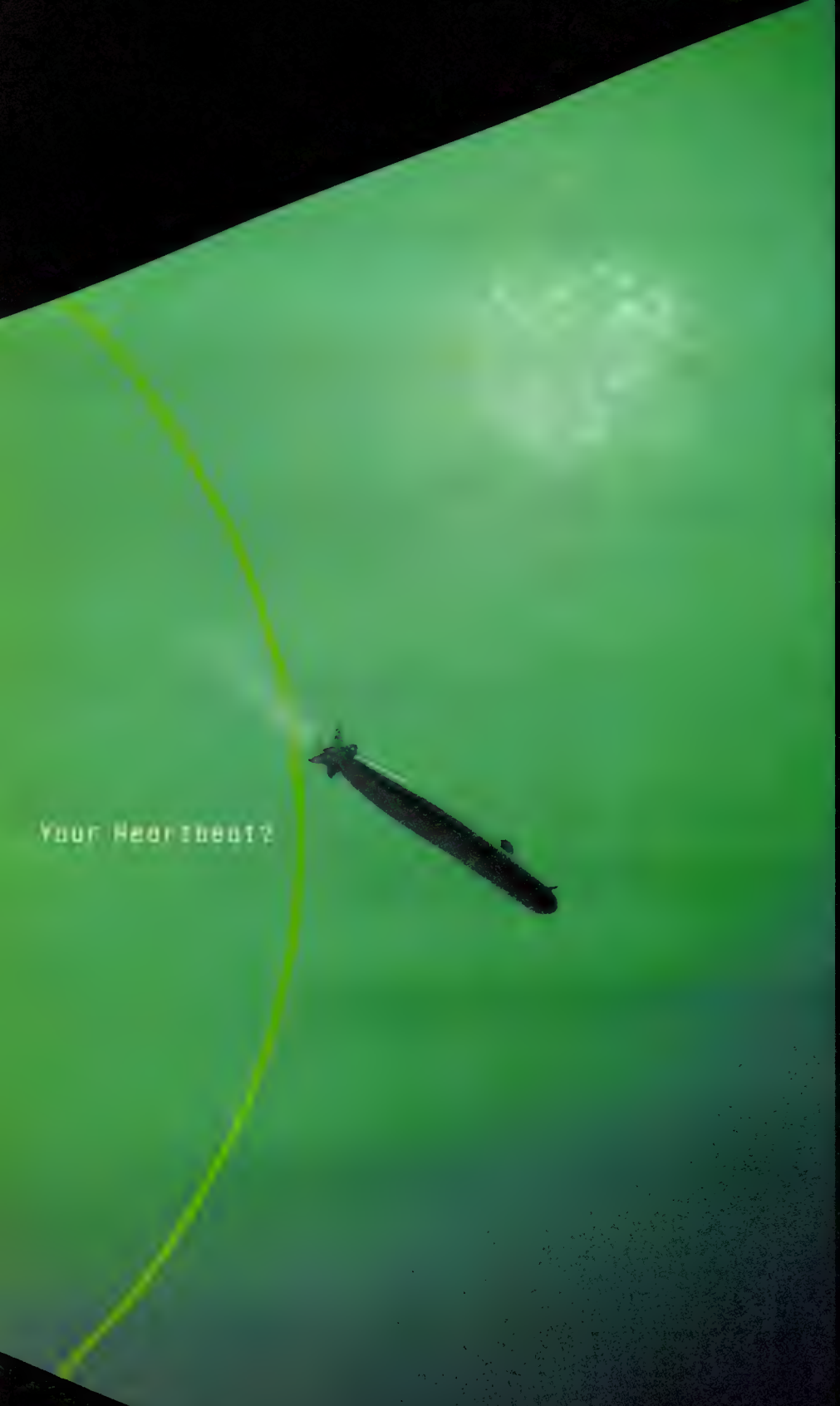

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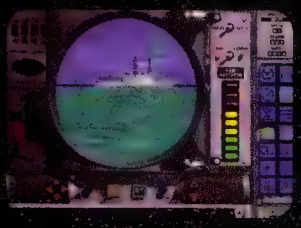

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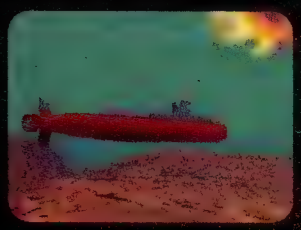

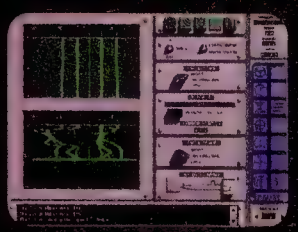

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Virgin spreads its wings

With Sabre Ace, Virgin Interactive has the competition in their sights

VIRGIN INTERACTIVE AND DEVELOPMENT partner Eagle Interactive have set their gun sights on the well populated air combat sim market with the creation of their *Virgin Ace* brand (not to be confused with the Sierra/Dynamix *Aces* series). The first installment of this series is *Sabre Ace* (the follow-up is *Phantom Ace,* focused on the F-4 during the Vietnam era). While the title refers to the famous North American F-86F Sabre flown in the Korean War and may evoke visions of a "traditional," in-depth, singe vehicle simulation such as *Falcon* or the *F-15 Strike Eagle* series, *Sabre Ace* takes the *Pacific Air War/US Navy Fighters* style approach: model a few aircraft to sample within a specific period. So you'll fly missions in an F-51 Mustang (later variant of the P-51), F-80 ShootingStar, MiG-15, Yak-9, and of course, the F-86 over the Korean Peninsula.

Aside from brief teases in *Chuck Yeager Air Combat* and both *Air Warrior* products (and excluding *MiG Alley Ace* for the Commodore 64), the Korean War era has been neglected by flight sim developers (just like Vietnam, a fact which Virgin looks to rectify with *Phantom Ace*). *Sabre Ace* has no campaign play, but the missions allow you to experience the same situation from different perspectives. For instance, on an escort mission, you can play from the escort POV or as an enemy interceptor. While some may balk at "canned" missions, it does allow you to *experience* alternate situations encountered in this war - "experience" being the key word here. The goal for the *Virgin Ace* franchise is to produce sims that are realistic enough for the hardcore types, while at the same time including enough assistance to make them accessible for the novice.

The excellent terrain is quite evident in this shot

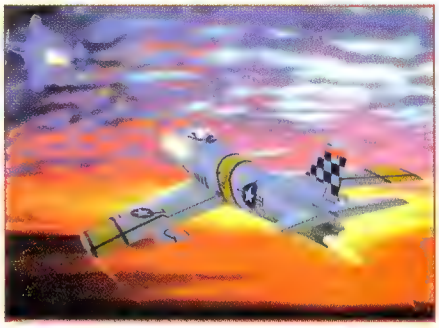
So just how *realistic* is realistic? Produced by Vietnam vets (one who flew as a RIO and another a founder of one the civilian fighter pilot "dream camps"), a rear admiral and other real life pilots, there's a chance the game may prove *too* realistic. Missions begin with briefings that "realistically" *sometimes* include recon photos of targets. You'll fly day and night missions under some weather conditions (a cloud layer is modeled, but wind isn't). While the terrain is generic, the actual placement of mountains, cities, rivers, etc., and distances are accurate (you can even fly to Japan if you'd like). This means ingress and egress can be long and boring (though a "zap" function allows you to bypass these). Your flight path is presented on your kneeboard/mission log and lists waypoints in the form of ADF (Automatic Direction Finder) frequencies and bearings. A map is available during flight, but there is currently no zoom function or constantly updated position info. You have to learn navigation if you're going to make it to your target. Fortunately, early missions start you as a wingman, so all you'll need to do is follow your flight leader (don't lose sight of him).

The cockpit view from the Mig

But when we're talking extreme realism, that's easier said than done. On real military sorties, your squadron flies in formation all the way to target and back. To help you along, a feature called Form Augmentation, a pseudo autopilot (much like the "driving line magnet" found in racing sims) has been created. Finally, a series of interactive training missions are available to help you learn the skills you'll eventually need to take command as flight leader (you'll be able to transfer your medals, rank, and all to *Phantom Ace* when that ships).

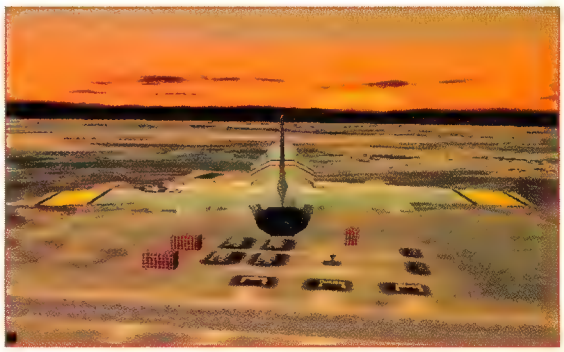
The projected minimums are a 133MHz Pentium with 16MB of RAM. The producers plan to take advantage of the capabilities of specific 3D accelerators to provide the optimum 640x400 SVGA performance "even if it means bypassing Direct3D." The build we saw was less than glass smooth on the recommended system using a *3D Blaster*, but further code optimization should help.

TCP/IP, LAN, and serial head-to-head modes are supported, and the stand-alone custom combat mode allows you to fly against many of the aircraft from this era. Some of the more obscure aircraft modeled include the F-82 Twin Mustang, and the F84 Thunderjet.



Will Sabre Ace fly off into the sunset?

The flight models in the pre-alpha version (estimated ship date Sept. 1997) understandably still require tweaking, so we can't comment on them, but if the attention to detail in other areas is any indication, we should be pleasantly surprised. Enemy AI wasn't working yet, and a fixed view switching type of padlock mode called "target lock" has currently been chosen over a scrolling system because high fidelity instrumentation was preferred. The *Virgin Ace* vision is commendable, but whether Virgin can ultimately do it all and, more importantly, do it *right* still has yet to be seen. Stay tuned for progress updates. *–Ben Chiu*



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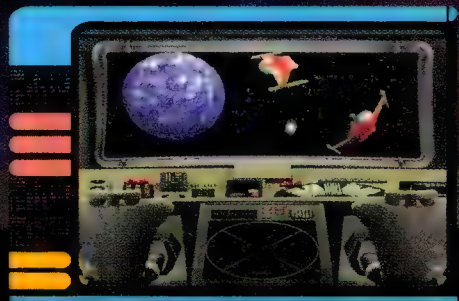

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"Fewer, better games"

Sierra's Impressions division focuses on three titles for '97

"FEWER, BETTER GAMES" IS APPARENTLY the new mantra at Sierra, and it's something their Impressions division in Boston has taken to heart; postponing or delaying projects and focusing efforts into one expansion pack (for *Lords of the Realm II*) and three new titles for 1997: *Captives*, a strategy-action mix that's a new area for Impressions; *Civil War Generals*, the sequel to last year's *Robert E. Lee*; and *Lords of Magic*, a fantasy strategy game. One feature common to all the games will be multiplayer/Internet play, with particular emphasis on supporting the Sierra Internet Gaming System (SIGS). While working on expanding their games' multiplayer capabilities, Peter Haffenreffer, Impressions' General Manager, is quick to promise that single-player gaming won't suffer; rather, by doing "fewer, better games" they have the resources to ensure that all areas of their games get strong design and development support.

The "oddball" title of the bunch, *Captives* is Impressions' first real foray into mixed gaming genres; producer Glenn Oliver likes to refer to it as a strategy game with an arcade pace. Frenetic combat, however, is *not* the emphasis of the game; rather, Oliver likens play to a combination of *Lemmings* and *Choplifter*, where your goal is to get the population of a colony world to safety, solving puzzles and dealing with (or just plain avoiding) an alien menace. You play a hero-type by the name of Dak Ransom, sent to rescue the colonists from the attacks of the colony's previously undiscovered inhabitants.

Control a variety of vehicles as you try to rescue the colonists in Captives

Dak can jump into a number of vehicles–from motorcycles up to heavy lifters akin to those seen in the movie *Aliens*–and use them to collect colonists and escort them to safety. Colonists come in several types, and you must use their skills to evacuate each domed crater successfully: scientists can research new technologies, engineers can upgrade civilian vehicles to military, and soldiers can help you fight the aliens (civilians are just hopeless; evacuate them ASAP). You'll encounter a variety of terrain, find "power-ups" for your vehicles, and explore colonial buildings and crawl deep into alien tunnel systems. Multiplayer can be either competitive (with several "heroes" working to save the most people) or possibly co-operative, and the system requirements are fairly mild (Impressions is shooting for a minimum 486DX-100). Control of your character/vehicles can be either keyboard, joystick, or keypad, but for you strategy gamers who shudder at those terms, don't worry: the pacing will be low enough that even this joystick-incompetent thinks he'll be able to play. Expect a late Summer release.

Cities in Lords of Magic will be a little more abstract than those of Lords of the Realm II

For *Civil War Generals* (a working title) the team under developer Steve Grammont is taking the wishes and complaints gamers had with *R.E. Lee* and Impressions' own internal ideas and working them into a vastly expanded product. *Civil War Generals* includes two major campaigns (Eastern and Western Theatres, playable from either the Union or Confederate perspective), some possible minor campaigns (a couple of small scenarios and one large one), and more individual scenarios (40 is the current count). New unit types include mortars, gunboats and Men of War, light and heavy cavalry and artillery, and perhaps even engineer units, while new terrain features being considered are forts, obstacles, and beach hexes. Two major new components are multiple resolution support (with two playable zoom levels no matter the resolution) and a fully integrated scenario editor. Current plans call for a Fall release.

Tactical, real-time combat in Lords of Magic

Not a specific sequel, *Lords of Magic* is being billed as the next game in the *Lords* series. While the game uses *Lords of the Realm II*'s dual turn-based strategic/real-time tactical approach, the game's engine is completely new, and the setting is quite different. You will take charge of one of four major races (human, barbarian, elves, or dark elves) and attempt to lead that race to ultimate dominion over the land. Unlike most strategy games of this sort, you will actually be represented on the battlefield as a character, meaning you can be killed. Strategically, you'll direct the movement of forces, trade with other players, form alliances (you can get a combined "win" in alliance mode), and even call down powerful earth-altering magics with effects similar to those in *Populous*. When two enemy groups meet the game switches to a real-time combat mode much different from that of *Lords II*; graphically similar to the upcoming *Myth* or even Sierra's own *Birthright*, correct employment and maneuvering of your forces will be more important than the speed of your mouse inputs. An ambitious title, Impressions is taking their time; current plans call for a Christmas-time release.

Sure, not a lot of games, but ones that all seem very solid; we will of course be bringing you more as the year and the projects progress. *–Scott Udell*

A key feature of Civil War Generals is the scenario editor

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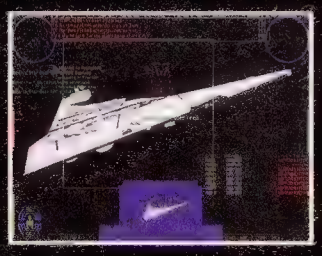
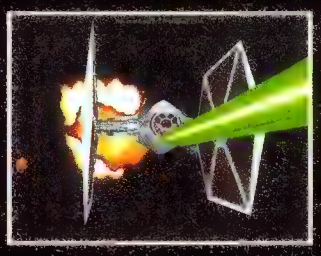
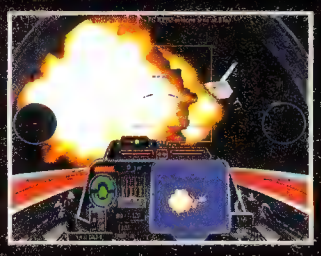
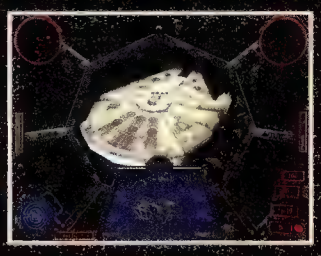
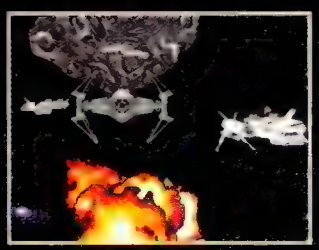
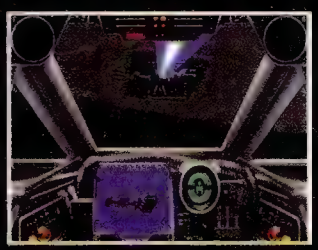
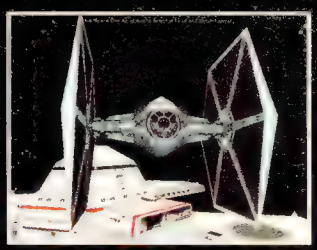





(Floyd from Accounting.)

engine is phenomenal. The new missions are masterstrokes of space mayhem. There's even single player campaigns for an all-new explosive experience. No wonder *Computer Gaming World* proclaims **X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter** "number one on every space sim-er's wish list." And if you don't believe them, just ask Floyd. http://www.lucasarts.com







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TalonSoft opens new fronts

Some new games, a new distributor… and Norm Koger

BEST KNOWN FOR THEIR BATTLEGROUND series of wargames, TalonSoft will be continuing with this strong product line while expanding into other areas. *Napoleon in Russia* (see below) and *Bull Run* will be the next two games in the series, and should both be shipping by the time you read this. Expect wider market penetration of these titles as TalonSoft has just signed a distribution agreement with Brøderbund Software. *Prelude to Waterloo* will probably be the only other game in the series to release this year, because quite a bit of effort is being put into the new *Campaign* engine (*East Front*, previously covered here in *CGS+* news, will be the first game to sport the new engine); *Age of Ironclads* may also come out late this year.

Signs Norm Koger

Perhaps the biggest news for TalonSoft, however, is the signing of Norm Koger, independent designer of wargames who has worked previously with SSI. While probably best known for his most recent tactical-level titles, *Wargame Construction Set II: Tanks!* and *Wargame Construction Set III: Age of Rifles*, Koger has also designed games with an operational scale: *Red Lightning*, *Conflict: Middle East*, and *Conflict: Korea*. It is to this scale that he is returning in his next project, tentatively titled *The Operational Art*. In it he plans to cover operational-level conflicts from 1939-1953, with battles that could include Manchuria '39, North Africa '41-'43, and Korea '50-'51. If this first game does well, Koger plans to develop *The Operational Art, Volume 2* covering historical or plausible conflicts from the 1950s up through the near future with conflicts like Desert Storm, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Falkland Islands war.

Wargame designer Norm Koger will be doing an operational scale game for TalonSoft

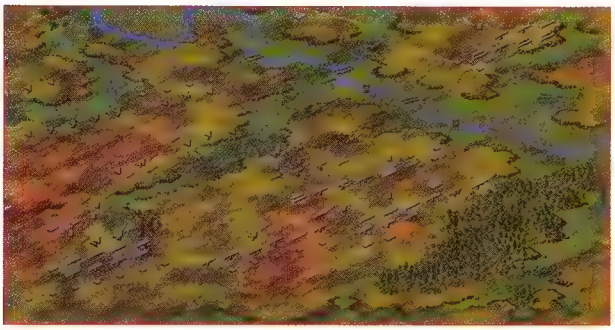
Says Koger, "Unlike other recent or planned games, *The Operational Art* will be heavily optimized for solitaire play, with significant development effort devoted to simulation elements and programmed opponent algorithms rather than network or internet play. I don't want to alienate new gamers, but where design compromises are necessary I intend to optimize this title for serious wargamers. This is the game I've wanted to do for years. I plan to have fun with it." Neither Koger nor TalonSoft expect this title to ship until sometime in 1998.

Napoleon in Russia: The graphics standards of Waterloo have if anything been improved upon

Napoleon in Russia

Due to the quirk of its new relationship with Brøderbund, *Napoleon in Russia* and *Bull Run* should be shipping nearly concurrently (and their release dates have been moved up from June to May 15th); while TalonSoft has not released any more information on *Bull Run*, they did send us beta of *Napoleon in Russia*. Despite its grand sounding title (chosen more for marketing purposes), it is still focused on a single, momentous battle from history: Borodino. Seventy-five miles west of Moscow it was here, on September 7th, 1812 that the forces of Napoleon grappled with those of Russian Marshal Prince Kutuzov in the titanic struggle immortalized in Tchaikovksy's "1812 Overture."

Initially, *Napoleon in Russia* looks much like its predecessor in the *Battleground* line: the same larger hexes of *Waterloo*, same colorful costumes, same huge scope. Like most of TalonSoft's games, however, it's not just a direct port of the *Waterloo* engine to a new battle; changes have been made and new features added. Topping the list of improvements is a series of new optional rules. Players can now turn on cavalry counter charges (probably the biggest gripe some *grognards* had with *Waterloo*):



Napoleon in Russia: This extremely zoomed-out shot captures just part of the French line in the full Borodino scenario–a massive battle is in the offing

The beta of Napoleon in Russia contains 17 historical and "what-if" scenarios–TalonSoft hopes to have about 20 in the final game

during a player's defensive phase he or she can have Good Order cavalry units charge against enemy cavalry units which have moved within range (suffering the same disordering effects of a normal cavalry charge in the process). You can now get victory points by nabbing Nappy if you turn on the "Victory Points for Leader Casualties" option; wound leaders and get half points, capture them whole and get double. Route Limiting cuts down on the frequency of having an entire defensive line collapse due to the morale effects of seeing one unit route, and partial retreats cause a portion of a unit to be eliminated so that it can be fit into a hex (instead of completely eliminated due to overstacking rules). Lastly, Extreme Fog-of-War hides enemy unit names and qualities from view, and gives you only partial information on strength.

The scenario selection was still not finalized in the beta we were given, but the typical TalonSoft mix of large and small, historical and hypothetical scenarios is there. Play-by-e-mail gamers will be happy with the increased number of scenarios with fewer turns (this is not to say that they're all necessarily smaller; many are still quite large in scope, just shorter in length), and those grown used to TalonSoft's graphics won't be disappointed. *–Scott Udell*

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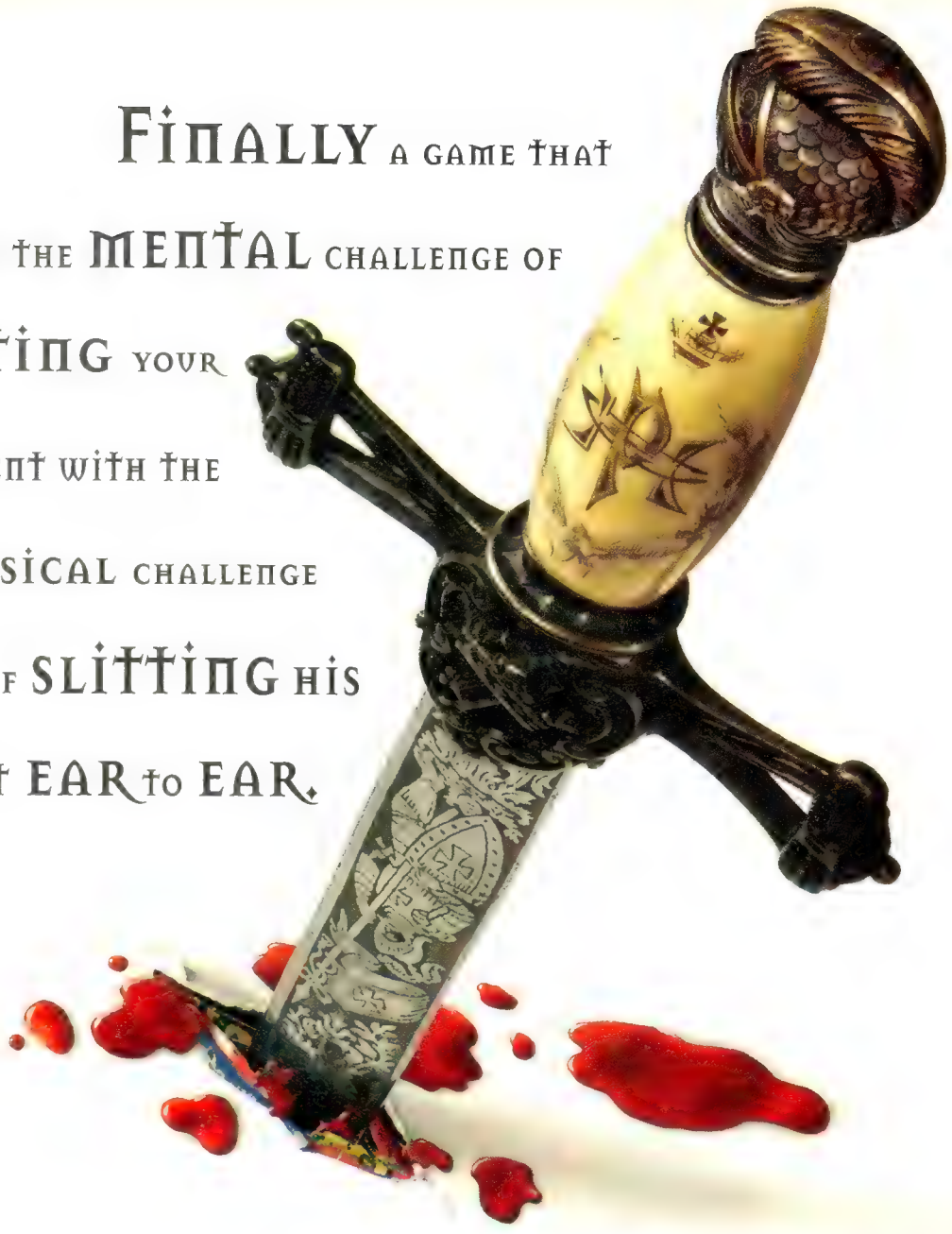

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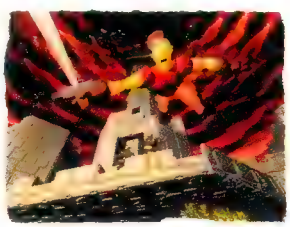

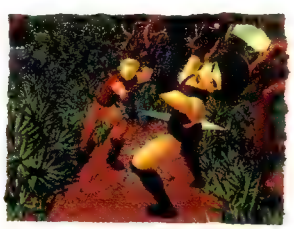

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Warcraft Adventures: Lords of the Clans

Blizzard goes on a surprising adventure beyond Beyond the Dark Portal

FIRST LOOK STILL RIDING HIGH ON the success of its real-time strategy *Warcraft* series, followed by the blockbuster hit *Diablo*, Blizzard Entertainment has announced its latest title, *Warcraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans*. Building upon the Orcs-vs.-Humans universe created for *Warcraft*, the designers of *Lord of the Clans* will present a fantasy adventure that picks up where *Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal* left off. We'll return to the land of Azeroth in a game that is cross-dressed as a traditional adventure, with many of the original popular characters and locations developed via an in-depth storyline.

The player will take the role of Thrall, a young Orc who has been raised among Humans and consequently been denied his heritage. Thrall must evade his Human captors and attempt to reunite and lead the disbanded Orcish clans that roam through Azeroth, ultimately returning power to the Horde.

That orc hunk Thrall hangin' in the forest

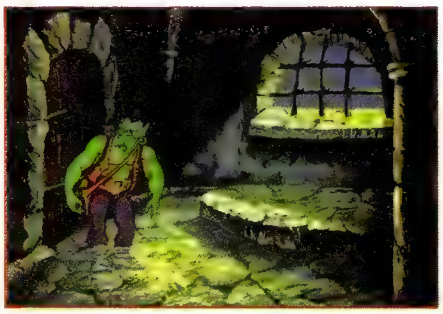
Allen Adham, president and founder of Blizzard said, "With *Warcraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans*, our goal is to recapture the elements that make adventure games great. Players will be immersed in the world of *Warcraft* with a rich storyline, character interaction and expensive exploration. The adventure game tells an important chapter in our overall vision for the *Warcraft* story. For the first time, players will interact with the Orcish Horde and learn about their history and motivations. The game adds to the depth of the *Warcraft* universe and provides the backstory for future titles."

Features of the game will include more than 60 locations within seven regions of Azeroth, over 70 animated characters, more than 40,000 frames of animation, a classical soundtrack and the voice talents of Hollywood's Clancy Brown (*Highlander*, *Starship Troopers*, *The Shawshank Redemption*), Peter Cullen (*Optimus Prime*) and Tony Jay (Disney's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*).

Excellent visuals like this should be prevalent throughout

Warcraft fans can look forward to a 1997 holiday season release. Zug-zug. *–Cindy Yans*

Warcraft Adventures: Lords of the Clans • *Blizzard Entertainment* • *Windows 95*



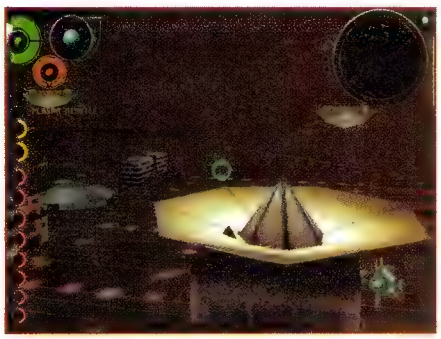
Thrall contemplates the meaning of "Zug-zug"

BRIEFS: Errata – Last month's "First Look" at the game *Eclipse: Shattered Empire* was not representative of what the final product will look like. **Sirtech** has informed us that the name has been changed, and the entire visual look of the game has been revamped... **Lara's back** – Eidos will be relesing *Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business*, an add-on pack for *Tomb Raider*. It will include two additional "expert levels," a library of high-resolution Lara Croft images, and preview materials on *Tomb Raider 2*... **Wilbur joins Epic** – Epic has announced that Jay Wilbur, former "Biz Guy" of id software, has joined their staff as "Imperial Advisor." Wilbur will help coordinate the launch of their upcoming titles, including *Unreal*. ■

Flying Saucer

Fly the unfriendly alien skies

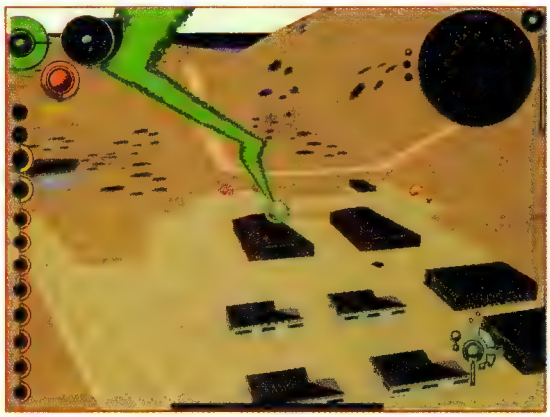
FIRST LOOK IS IT TRUE THAT THE United States government is somewhat behind an alien plot to destroy the world? This is one question that is raised in AnyRiver's upcoming first-person interactive title in which *you* pilot a UFO (at which point you probably identify it and spoil its name). You plummet into an alien war and find the fate of the Earth on your shoulders.



That old alien standby, the radar dish

Featuring voice acting by Jeanne Tripplehorn (*Waterworld*, *The Firm*), John Cale (The Velvet Underground) and Neil Gamon (author of *The Sandman* cartoons), the game dredges up and incorporates actual UFO data. From abduction reports (fond fodder of *The National Enquirer*), to alien descriptions and accounts from Area 51 Research Center experts, *Flying Saucer* attempts to create as based-in-reality a scenario as possible about the question of UFOs. Says AnyRiver president Stewart Bonn, "We expect *Flying Saucer* to bring about a new genre of interactive entertainment that takes players into a subversive gaming experience."

You play Boone, whose girlfriend Emily has been abducted by alien forces. You must travel from Antarctica to Gizah to Tikal to the Bermuda Triangle in an effort to rectify what's been going on between the alien species, the Greys, and the Government's Advanced Security Agency (ASA). So, if Bonn plans a subversive experience – and the government is behind it – be sure to watch where you bend over. *–Cindy Yans*



Will alien-sim grognards complain about the flight model?

Flying Saucer • *AnyRiver Entertainment* • *Windows 95*

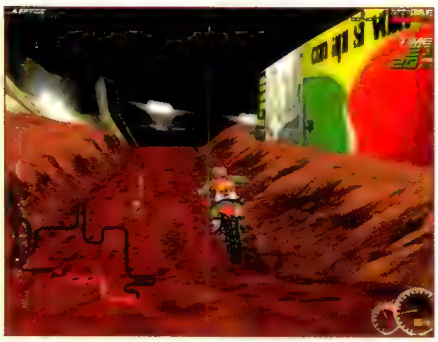
Moto Racer GP

Giving the player plenty of room to vroom

The old "race next to the ocean" scene. Always a favorite

FIRST LOOK SEEMINGLY COMING from nowhere (or France), *Moto Racer GP* would appear to be another of those arcade racing games Sega likes to bring to the PC world. Only *Moto Racer GP* is from BMG Interactive. And it has network play. And incredible 3D accelerated graphics. It also has incredibly entertaining gameplay, even at this stage of development.

Created by Delphine, of *Fade to Black* infamy, *Moto Racer GP* is an arcade motorcycle racing game with little pretense toward simulation. There are eight tracks in all, from street courses to dirt tracks, and when you're sick of them, you can drive them in reverse. Multiplayer options include modem and null-modem for two players, and an eight-player LAN option (alas, IPX is the only protocol supported – Kali fans ready your emulators).



You can do it in the dirt as well

After spending some time with a nearly-complete version of the game, it's clear that this is a must-have game for arcade racers and owners of 3D cards. The "feel" is good, but it's the visuals that are the main drawn. They're Direct3D-accelerated and deliver a glass-smooth 30 fps at 640x480x16-bit color on a 200MHz MMX Pentium with a 3Dfx accelerator (as well it should). For comparison purposes, a 133 MHz Pentium/Rendition combo couldn't cope at the same resolution. However, multiple screen resolutions and detail levels are supported for different speed machines, and those who are 3D card-challenged should find the non-accelerated visuals, resplendent in 16-bit color, mighty fine, superior to those found in *Sega Rally* or *Daytona USA*.

Check out the high-polygon count bike

Scheduled for release around the time you're reading this, *Moto Racer GP* is definitely a game to watch for, especially for those of you living on the hardware bleeding edge. –*Steve Bauman*

Moto Racer GP • *BMG Interactive* • *Windows 95*

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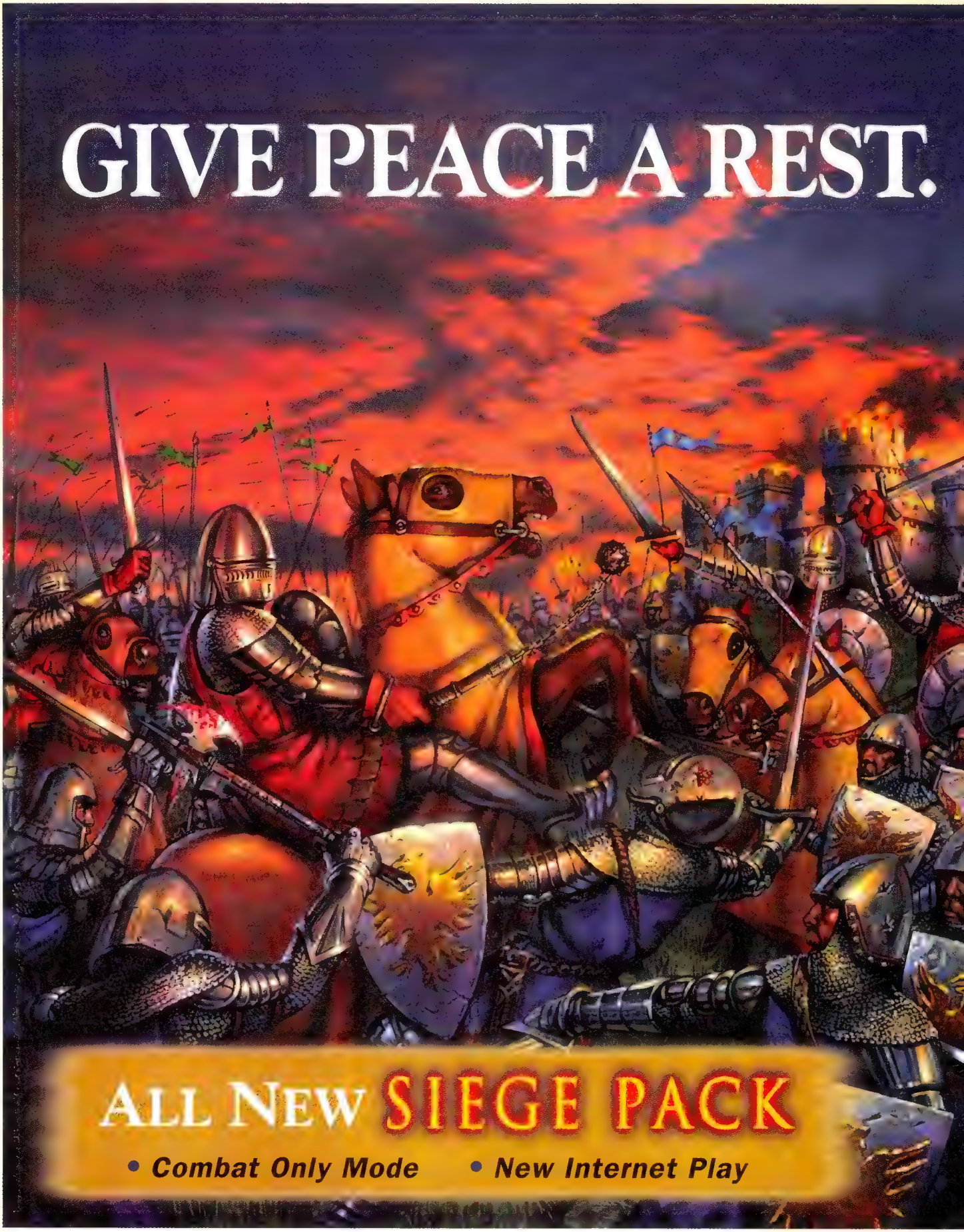

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By Steve Bauman

Flying Nightmares 2

Will the promise of a simulation/strategy hybrid be realized?

Flight simulators are getting more realistic, that's a given. With improving visuals, 3D cards and faster processors to crunch more complex flight models, there may be a day (soon) when a PC game will be able to replicate a perfect flight experience. But what then? What about accurately simulating the world surrounding the plane? Only a few companies are attempting that; DID, with *EF2000*, and Spectrum HoloByte with *Falcon*. Most games are content with a static mission-based approach, putting all of their work into the flight model and/or the visuals. When will someone take the next step?

Perhaps that next step is Eidos Interactive's *Flying Nightmares 2*. According to Eidos' Bryan Walker, the Producer and Designer of the project, "*Flying Nightmares 2* is an attempt, after five years of stagnation, at bringing something new to the flight simulation market." Those are bold words, and more than one project has made this claim in the past. We'll find out this summer.

Flying over the coast. The terrain looks good, in that 3D card sort of way. Note the vapor trails coming off the edges of the wings

The helicopters are ready for their support role. You can fly both the Harrier and the Cobra in the game

It's a flight simulator

Flying Nightmares 2 includes one campaign with 24 missions focusing on a military uprising in Cuba. It starts with a evacuation mission at Guantanamo Bay and will eventually lead to an assault on Havana itself. In these missions, the player will be able to fly both Harriers and Cobras. The campaign is not dynamic, as that would take over a year of extra development time to develop.

"How's the flight model," they ask. The Cobra model properly handles a number of major aerodynamic effects, including ground effect and retreating blade stalls. The Harrier performs realistically as well, but not so realistic that it compromises the entertainment value of the software.

The weapons are designed to be as realistic as possible. Sidewinders, for example, got their names because of their wiggling trajectories, and that is realistically modeled and visually represented in the game. The real Harrier has 25 different radar modes, and based on input from Harrier pilots, they've narrowed it down to the 10 that they actually use (they've gone ahead and modeled two more).

A virtual cockpit is included, one that attempts to model peripheral vision. What they've done is put up an identifier when something is within 60 degrees of your forward view. Until you turn to get a bead on what's out there, the identifier will be generic. This is designed to help out with situational awareness.

The 3D engine used in *Flying Nightmares 2* is optimized for use with 3D accelerator cards on high-end machines, with support for incredibly high frame rates at 640x480x65,000 colors. It will support Direct3D, as well as custom versions for specific chipsets. An MMX version will also be produced, at a cost of the high-realism flight model that uses floating point math (a flaw in the MMX technology is that it uses the floating point unit). The MMX version will also support 16-bit color, but lack many of the specialized 3D technologies that the hardware cards support (bi-linear filtering, mip-mapping, etc.).

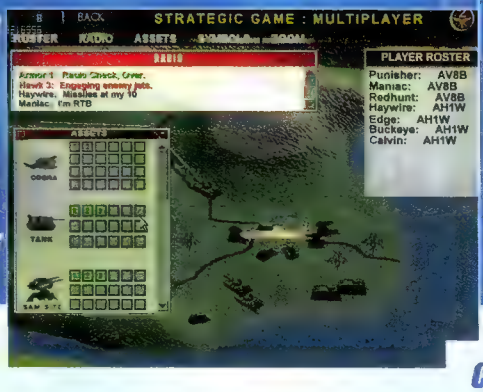
On the sound front, the game uses software-based Q-Sound to provide realistic depth-cued stereo sound effects. Passing a Harrier with a Cobra on a runway shows off this feature to great effect, and a Cobra hovering next to a hangar will produce echoes.

But just being a flight simulator wasn't enough for Walker and his team. "We looked at the best-selling simulations, at their technical features, and we are bringing the same amount of attention to detail to this game. But we also knew we had to bring something else to the genre, so we took the cue from the original *Flying Nightmares* [released for the Macintosh] and brought in a strategic element. We're expanding on it to bring *Flying Nightmares 2* not only up to the level of, but beyond such games as *Command & Conquer*."

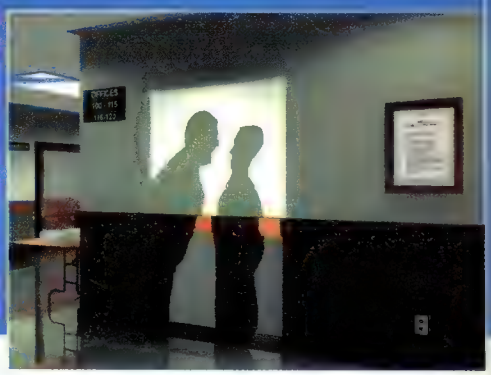
It's a real-time strategy game

The heart of *Flying Nightmares 2* is its built-in real-time strategy game. Dubbed *Commandant*, it allows would-be commanders pretty complete control over every unit in the battle. "We looked at some of the alternatives," says Walker, "especially *TACTCOM* for *EF2000*, but most of them have interface problems and a lack of flexibility. The simplistic combat that those games have had to go. In [our] strategic game, the combat is mathematically resolved that taking into account unit facing, its position and the terrain it's on"

A simple point-and-click interface may remind gamers of games like *Command & Conquer*, but it's a lot more involved. The basic commands you can issue include move, attack target, entrench, hide, charge, suppress and bypass, escort, defend and join. The graphical representation of the battle is very simple, but the math running underneath is quite complex. Overall, it won't be as fast-paced as *Command & Conquer*, but it will be more realistic.



The Commandant section of the game. Defend your base at all costs. Click on the numbers in the "assets" windows to get field reports from your units



In the multiplayer game, you can chew out players who don't follow your orders. If they get really annoying, kick them out

You can combine units in the strategic game into task forces, and at that point they achieve a synergistic effect, directly dependent on the types of units that they face. Units will attack instinctively that represent the greatest threat to them, and the player will be able to override this by assigning them the target.

One thing unique to the game are the rules for sighting ground objects. A Harrier, for example, can make multiple passes over a forested region and never notice a squad of soldiers camped out there, whereas the Cobra may be able to detect them. If the squad decides to fire on the crafts, that changes everything, and greatly increases the chance that they will be spotted.

This fits in perfectly with the more strategic focus to the game, because it will be imperative that the player use their ground troops to identify targets for the Harriers. If you're flying in a Harrier, you'll see empty areas where troops may exist. Visually, no simulation can do a proper high-resolution rolling terrain, so the game will fake it by just not showing the units unless they're spotted. However, if you're positive there are units in an area, you could choose to bomb it, and if the units just happened to have been there they will take damage.

It's a multiplayer Internet game

Flying Nightmares 2 is also an Internet application. One person can serve a game for up to 16 players (who can jump in and out of the game at any time). One person will create a game, and it will broadcast a unique TCP/IP identifier, allowing others to locate that game. Once located, it will list the scenario on that server, including winning conditions and the map being used (the maps are generic islands).

Winning conditions include a simple points battle (based on kills), the destruction of the enemies headquarters, a "King of the Hill" scenarios where you attempt to get the most ground units in a certain area, and "Last Man," where you have to destroy every ground and air unit (except infantry–that would be eternal and tedious).

Once in motion, the game can work any number of ways. It's always structured as two teams, the Red versus the Blue, and one player on each side is the Commander (they can transfer control to someone else as well). On Any number of players can be watching the strategic game, and anyone can jump into any Harrier or Cobra at any time. Teammates can communicate with the commander and assign targets to each other. A commander can send a flying unit a command, and if you're flying that vehicle a new mission will pop-up on screen. You can choose to fly it, or not. If you don't, you can be reprimanded or kicked out of the battle by the commander.

It's a computer game

Ultimately, the great difficulty in putting together a game that mixes genres is that one is it ends up appealing to no one. If the flight simulation part of the game isn't top-notch, with a high caliber flight model and realistic weapons systems, simulation fans will be upset. If the strategy game is dull, it will be of no interest to wargamers. Simulation fans may not want to play general, and wargamers may not want to fly. These are the risks that the game faces.

However, if Eidos can pull it off, this could be a special game, one that really does bring something new to the flight simulation market. So far, what we've seen looks quite impressive, but it will take a lot of analysis to see if it really works together, if the disparate elements gel into one cohesive whole. ■

Commandant Units

AV-8B Harrier
Can be flown by the player. Used against enemy aircraft and ground forces. Guest starred in *True Lies* (as a Harrier).

AH-1W Cobra
Can be flown by the player. Armed with a 20mm cannon, rockets and TOW or Hellfire missiles. Useful against armored units.

M1A1 Tank Platoons
The most powerful and important ground unit.

M-1009A2
Artillery that provide fire support from up to 30km. Perfect for support roles, as they can be set to automatically fire upon spotted units.

LAV-25
An Armored Personnel Carrier designed to carry units across the battlefield.

Infantry, Reconnaissance, Special Forces
Difficult to detect, these units can provide target designation for vehicles equipped with Hellfire or Maverick missiles.

Avenger
A Humvee with a Stinger. Fastest vehicle on the battlefield.

Hawk III
Surface-to-air missile with a range of over 50 miles.

CH-46
Utility helicopter useful for transporting troops or rescuing downed pilots.

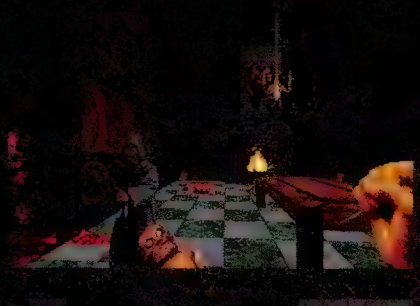
EH-60 "Quick Fix"
Jams enemy radio communications, keeping them from being able to receive new orders.

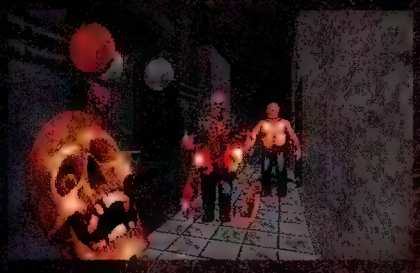
Combat Engineer
Can repair runways, deploy bridges and clear minefields. Armed only with slide rules and pocket protectors.

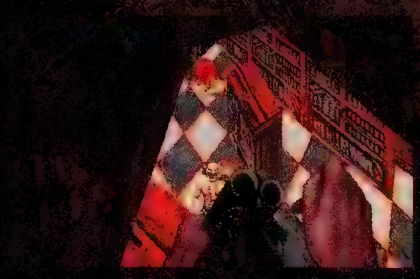
E2C "Hawkeye"
Provides radar coverage over the battlefield's airspace. A prime target for the other guys. Played by Alan Alda in the game.

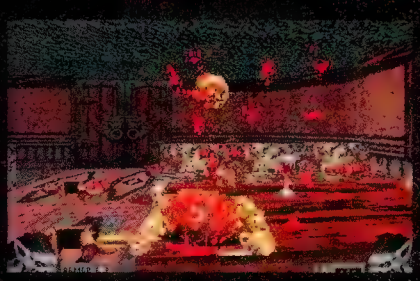
RPV
A remotely piloted vehicle that can search out targets with great speed. Hard to hit.

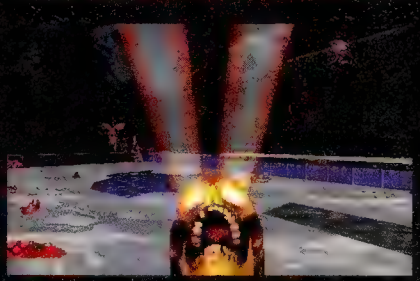
sink into the











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-Adrenaline Vault

☆☆☆☆☆

-PC Gaming Review

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-Next Generation On-Line

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GT Interactive Software

Many players have been waiting about a decade for Electronic Arts to give birth to Wasteland 2 for what has been an incontestably long gestation period. Since EA showed no signs of going into labor, nor did they choose to implant the license into the fruitful womb of a competitor, Interplay decided that long enough was long enough, and spawned Fallout: A Post Nuclear Adventure, which many are calling the "unofficial sequel" to Wasteland.

Pretend you're the guy in Terry Gilliam's cult classic film Brazil, cruising above the clouds smiling, flapping immense fake wings; and you're listening to a fifties brand of swing-croon through static-filled radio cabinet speakers. Billboards flash by, advertising wonderful products that will make your teeth clean and bright, your dog's coat shiny or your bunions shrink. The wailing crooner fades, you crash, and as reality explodes, so does a victim's head in a splatter of blood before your eyes. You blink. The world is greasy...bleak and dismal...filled with the mutation of spirit as well as environment. This is the world of Fallout – this is the carnival of nuclear holocaust. This is a light-hearted cotton candy caper of an RPG. Well, perhaps not, but alongside the harsh and dark elements lies team Fallout's slickly tongue-in-cheek slant on the universe of The Morning After.

Fallout

MORE FUN IN THE POST-NUCLEAR WORLD

BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A CHIP?

It is 80 years after WWIII, "The-Bigger-One", wreaked nuclear havoc on the planet. Several generations of your family have spent these years in the confines of Vault 13, originally purchased by your great grandparents who fell in love with it in *Better Vaults and Gardens*. Perhaps families had been upgrading their vaults and deeding them to their children since WWII, The-Big-One. No matter that radiation would probably not be rampant eighty years after the explosion, the thought of stepping out is still traumatic. This concrete palace has kept your character entirely insulated from the outside world, and now you find that its water purification controller chip is useless. You lose the vault lottery and hence become the one chosen to brave the outside world and hunt down a replacement.

This controller chip plot element is part of the glue that holds the game together. Since ensuring non-linearity has been an important design strategy, there has to be something goal-oriented and focal to drive the plot along. The water chip dilemma is the "hook" that pulls the player's character out of the vault; once out, he or she may wander just about anywhere in exploration of the dearth-land. Many sub-plots evolve during the search for the replacement chip, as well as situations that will add skills and experience to the character. Approximately the first third of the game will be devoted to finding the chip. During this stage, the player begins to get information which leads him or her to the second plot element, which we will not discuss in full lest the game be spoiled. Let it be said that there is something a lot more sinister going on that has the potential to create a *much* greater danger to the vault-dwellers than the missing water chip.

These two plot arcs are the game's main sources of structure. The additional elements of gameplay are very non-restrictive, since it is so important to the design team that the player be able to explore at will. Player actions will provide results which will enrich the story, and further detail character development. Moral dilemmas are present at every turn. For instance, once you *do* find the water chip, will you take it to save your own people, even if it means risking the lives of the folks who are using it? Tough decision.

STYLES AND SLICES AND DISAPPEARING ROOFS

The look of the game can only be described as *retro-futuristic*, or as some of the design team call it, *high-low tech*. It's as though the world stopped and froze somewhere in the 1950's – which is, of course, what happened. Team *Fallout* was inspired by many sources, such as *Brazil*, of course, and *The City of Lost Children*. The combat-soldier image in the game sports an eyepiece on his helmet as a direct reference to the Cyclops characters in *The City of Lost Children*. There will be many references, direct and indirect, drawn from other sources, including *The X Files*, *Star Wars*, and *Road Warrior*.

In the game, there is a little dog in Junk City who requires active befriending. However, if you are wearing the ever-popular black leather armor, the critter *automatically* befriends you, because he thinks you're Mel Gibson as "The Road Warrior" (*if Road_Warrior then Friendly_Dog*).

Any time one of the design team came across a picture of a weapon or piece of armor from *anywhere* (such as *Soldier of Fortune* or *Ladies' Home Journal*) and it was "cool enough" to include, it was fair game. Entertaining gems have been imported from just about everywhere, hence almost everyone will find something about which to reminisce. Says Tim Cain, producer/lead programmer, "It reminds me of *Mystery Science Theater*. They always say, 'People aren't going to get all of our jokes, but the people who *will* get them will really appreciate them...'"

The view is isometric hex, with the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't roof cutaways from the days of *Ultima VI*. Leonard Boyarsky, the lead artist, and his team have crafted detailed artwork that shouts "classically eerie," with dark and sinister overtones and plenty of soot-covered walls and overturned cars. Your character will interact with many NPCs and monsters, from Radscorpions, Mole-Rats and Centaurs to some characters that are presented in the form of talking heads. The "heads gang" will be played by voice actors such as David Warner and Ron Perlman (who also plays a narrator) and many others, most of whom will *not* receive general game billing for promotional purposes. The heads themselves have been sculpted from clay, digitally modeled and texture mapped, and are being painstakingly instilled with phoneme-level lip sync (which, they say happily, is a lot of work). The head screens will be sources of information and dialogue trees, and will provide the player with more "personal" contact with the world – a moderately hefty one with 12 different areas ranging in size from four to twenty 640x480s. There is a town called Shady Sands, and a location noted simply as Vats. An automap function allowing players to return to already visited areas is represented in a sort of radar map style, in keeping with the flat, more 2D look seen elsewhere in the game.

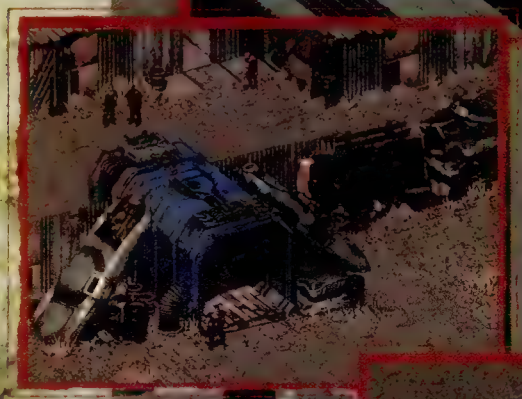
To aid in clue-gathering, a PIPboy 2000 (!?) is provided which will contain automatically added bits of importance, whether they come from dialogue or game events.

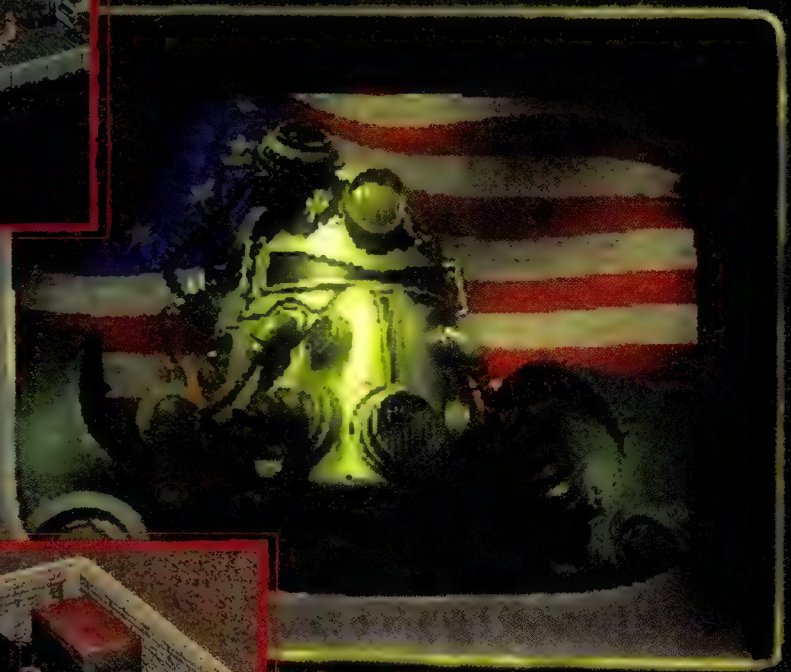
WHAT'S SO SPECIAL

Formerly associated with Steve Jackson Games [see this month's *Road to Nowhere*], *Fallout* has undergone a radical GURPS-ectomy, that has removed all traces of the Jackson's GURPS game system and replaced it with a very SPECIAL prosthesis. Now undergoing outpatient treatment, the game seems to be well on the road to recovery with all sutures healing nicely. SPECIAL stands for the attributes of Interplay's own skill set system (Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility and Luck), which was handily substituted for the GURPS system after the dissolution of the affiliation with SJG.

The player may choose between one of three canned characters (not a choice any *real* RPG-er would make), or may build his or her own. Of course, the three basic styles of character are tailored to the three modes of gameplay usually associated with RPGs: blow 'em away, outsmart 'em or the ever-popular rob 'em blind. SPECIAL is a point-based system which provides the player with a character that has average stats in all seven areas, each of which may be modified on a one-for-one trade basis.

There are no races in the game, although they initially proposed these character types: White Male, White Female, Black Male, Black Female, Asian Male, Asian Female, Mutant Male, Mutant Female, Ghoul Male and Ghoul Female. Eventually, they decided that to get the level of depth with each possible character type, they had to





BY CINDY YANS

Top to bottom: Home Sweet Vault; The entryway to Junktown resembles an auto graveyard; "I wanna drive the van." "No, me! No, me!"

Top to bottom: Junktown's favorite hangout; The character interface screen will be carefully lip-synced; Flamethrow singeing – the first step toward radscorpion thermidor

restrict the number of types. So now, you can play a man or (drum-roll) a woman (even though you may have had your heart set on Mutant Bovine). The team does invite you to *pretend* to be any race you like, though, since it is, after all, an RPG.

Players progress from Level 0 to Level 21, gaining experience, skills and perks along the way. The 18 skills increase with level-building and experience, and include basic weapon and combat proficiencies, as well as more specialized ones such as Doctor, Science and Gambling. Categorically, there will be 6 combat, 2 healing, 4 thief and 6 miscellaneous skills. Although the skill set is broader than originally planned (Science used to be broken down into *branches* of science), the designers feel that players would be unfairly compromised if they acquire a much-anticipated skill and find that it is only used in a minute sliver of the game. Perks may be selected after every third level-up and include range, movement and melee bonuses, radiation resistance and empathy among a list of 40 or more. Tradeoff possibilities exist here as well, as you will be able to get a perk at the cost of another stat.

Reputation statistics are derived from the player's behavior, and affect how he or she is perceived by groups and individuals. You can be a drunken, drug-addicted, champion, berserker child-killer – but not all at the same time. A champion child-killer, for instance, is not an option, although designers did toy with the idea of reputation being location- or town-specific.

CHOOSING UP SIDES

Although the hordes scream, "MULTIPLAYER MULTIPLAYER," designers feel that the game is best served in a single player environment, and have developed an interesting combat system involving teams. Instead of the traditional snag-a-party-member/recruit-a-gnome style of RPG in which you control all of the party members and trade the shirts off their backs, *Fallout* fills its combat sequences with team interaction. Many situations will involve a team of characters allying with you or against you and each other in what should prove to be an interesting twist in the world of RPG combat. Here you do not control the other characters; instead you *join* them (or they you) so that when you are attacked by an antagonist, you will see your protectors come to your aid in a very realistic team-combat simulation. There is no limit to the number of teams or "groupings" there can be. Perhaps there will be one composed of guards, one of peasants, one of mutated cattle, one of petulant manicurists…all will depend upon the relationships you have forged throughout the game by your actions. If you attack animals, perhaps that will set off Local 83, the Shepherd's Union; if you fire into a crowd, you're likely to create a mob scene – all sorts of situation-based hell are likely to break loose. The little Dog-Who-Would-Be-Mel is a fine ally and once befriended will loyally follow you and attack your enemies. QA testers have been *very* happy with the way this system is developing and say that it provides unusual and interesting gameplay.

Although the gamestory progresses in real-time, the combat itself is turn-based, giving the player time to form strategies, change weapons and armor or rush off to take a… Movement in the game is restricted to walking, running targeting and firing, all of which require action points. When your action points are depleted, your turn is over and you see the remaining creatures perform. Action points are then replenished at the beginning of your next turn. For extra fun during combat, you will be able to target specific areas of your antagonist: eyes, each arm, each leg, torso (the default target) and groin (ouch).

THAT'S A MIGHTY BIG GUN YOU HAVE THERE, SOLDIER

Choose from a plethora of weapons inflicting all types of damage such as fire, electrical, plasma, explosion or EMP and watch the gore fly. We'll see many vivid and gruesome ways to die (a violence meter is provided for the faint of heart). You will find three levels of violence: the bleed-a-little, the bleed-a-lot-with-parts-a-flying, or the bleed-all-over-with-*many*-parts-a-flying-and-becoming-completely-vaporized varieties. Of course the "explode like a blood sausage" metaphor that was provided to us for earlier coverage truly conveys the mood. The game will carry a Mature rating for animated violence, animated blood and gore, strong language, drug use, alcohol, gambling and blood-sausage-ism.

Here is a partial list of weapons: brass knuckles, billy club, crowbar, flamethrower, assault rifle, hunting rifle, knife, throwing knife, laser pistol, magnum pistol (DE.44), 10mm autoloader pistol, 14mm autoloader pistol, rocket launcher, shotgun, spear, SMG, sledgehammer and a frag and two other types of grenades. And what arsenal would be complete without a full array of ammo: 10mm AP, 10mm JHP 14mm AP, .223 FMJ, .44 FMJ, .44 JHP, 5mm AP, 5mm JHP and 9mm ball. With such an array of weapons, it'll be very hard to choose which to deploy now and which to wrap for Mother's Day. *Fallout* promises mass annihilation from beginning to end, tinged with moral struggle. Can this be a paradox? Nah.

At any rate, the members of team *Fallout* (formerly team GURPS) have hiked a long and rocky path between Scylla and Charybdis, (Interplay and SJG, that is), and are emerging intact – at least as intact as they were when they started (check out the Mutants section of their web page for some pretty scary bios). It appears as though they have sired a very spicy and solid RPG, one which is quite out of the ordinary. And all we can do now is hope for a timely summer birth, although, as we know, sales and marketing sometimes have to step in to perform an emergency cesarean section. ■

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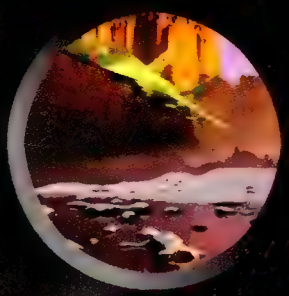

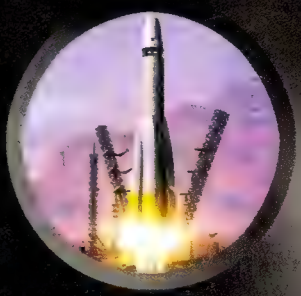

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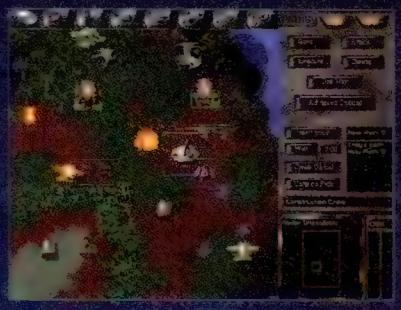
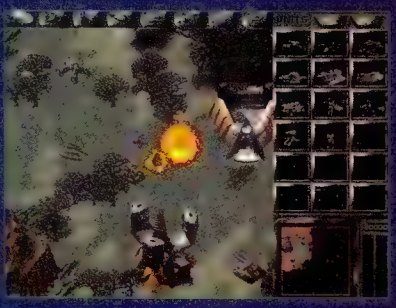


PLAYER-CONTROLLABLE UNIT AI

Determine each unit's behavior in combat. Place a unit on sentry duty, have it harass the enemy, or send it on a suicide mission. Set waypoints to launch simultaneous attacks on multiple fronts.



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AURAN

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OUTPOST 2

If at first you don't succeed...

by Scott Udell

Okay, so you saw the title and probably did a double take, but it's true—Sierra is doing a sequel to the game that, but for Battlecruiser 3000AD, is probably the most infamous game—and biggest gaming disappointment—in the eyes of many gamers. "What are they thinking?!" is a phrase that comes to mind, and one we put to Pat Cook, Director of the Outpost 2 project. We present here some of Pat's comments on the original and on what he and his team are trying to achieve with the sequel.

How did you get involved with the Outpost 2 *project?*

I'll have to admit to you I didn't have anything to do with the original. Alan McPheeters [Designer on *Outpost 2*] and I had been working on *Front Page Sports* titles for the last five years.

We actually had *Outpost 2* going here at the company—here at Dynamix—which had a different team and a different group on it. They were going to take the first one and expand upon it; fix a lot of things, do a lot of other things that apparently had been [part of] the customer feedback that had come in based on [the original game's] model.

Ken [Williams, President of Sierra] goes around to all the different divisions once every three to four months and looks at every product as it's being developed, as it's going along; he came and looked at *Outpost 2*, apparently, at one of those milestone meetings and decided it just wasn't any fun and he wanted to make a game out of it this time. He wanted to move away from this hard science simulation thing where you were having to worry about minutiae like "what's the oxygen level in agridome #12" and things like that .... so he pulled the plug on its current development.

At that point, then, Jeff Tunnell, who's our general manager here, came to me and said, "I need someone to do *Outpost 2*, do you want to take a look at it?" Up until that point I had not played *Outpost* and was not that familiar with [the game] and how it was received by the public and press, so I spent about a month going through all the feedback, playing the game, going through the strategy guide, [and] going through the walkthrough. Basically I found the customer feedback to be pretty much spot on as far as *my* perspective as a gamer; I agreed with almost everything they had to say. There were things about it that were real neat but there were a lot of things that didn't get finished, or weren't play balanced right, or were difficult to figure out, some of thing things in the interface itself. So I came back with a proposal that met a lot of different kind of criteria; we tried to incorporate a lot of the feedback that customers had, tried to keep the story based within the universe of the original one because I thought that was a really good premise, and we were also trying to keep Ken's directive of make it a game, make it fun....

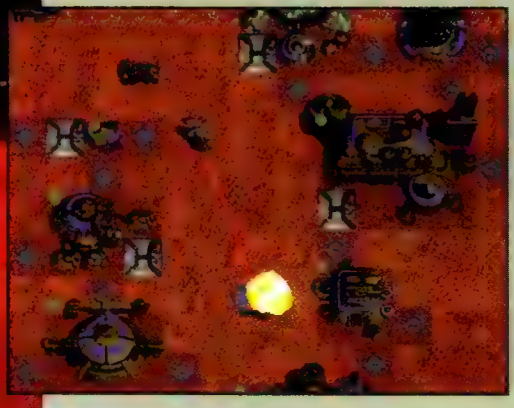
One of the biggest things I think the original *Outpost* did–and I don't know entirely because it was done down at Oakhurst–[was that] apparently they did a monster

▲ Buildings and vehicles may look familiar, but the gameplay is quite different

▼ While war isn't everything in the game, you'd better not play the appeaser

▲ Uh-oh– enemy's got the high ground!

▼ Each side takes a different approach; for example, Eden tends to be into destructive weaponry in a big way



Outpost 2– In Brief

In *Outpost 2*, as in the original, your goal is to ensure the success– or at least survival– of your colony. Instead of warfare against the massed forces of alien cultures, you fight the two things humanity has always fought: the environment of a hostile world and other humans. While the game continues the story of the original, gameplay is quite a bit different. First off, the game is real-time, so unit movement and actions (and combat, when it occurs) will feel somewhat similar to *Command & Conquer*. The game is also much less of a "simulation" than the original; while you still must keep your colonists safe and prosperous, the idea behind *Outpost 2* is to work successfully through the story, having fun as a gamer instead of facing the drudgery of management. To aid this change, the gameplay is now mission-oriented instead of free-form; again, more like a *C&C* than a *SimCity*. Whether *Outpost 2* will succeed where *Outpost* didn't remains to be seen; Pat Cook certainly thinks so, but it will be up to gamers to decide.

For even more from Pat Cook on Outpost 2 check out an expanded interview on the CG Online website at www.cdmag.com

strong-arm PR tactic on it where they were just hyping it beyond belief, it was the next greatest thing since sliced bread–and *it wasn't finished*, I guess; and the [game] went out, it didn't have a lot of things in it.... I've gone well, one thing we want to be sure of then, we don't want to over-promise... I'd rather under-promise and over deliver on this one.

You can't play with customers; you can't promise them stuff and then not have it there. There was stuff in the *manual* even–"build a monorail"–there was no monorail in the game! That's just... ack, I hate that! ... When people around here heard... "you're doing *Outpost 2*? What ... are you thinking?" I kind of look at [that] as a challenge to go, well, you know, we'll make it a very different kind of game, we'll let this one stand on its own merits. I point at *Dune* and *Dune II* as a good example of this; *Dune II* was a very different kind of game than *Dune I*, which was an adventure game. I loved *Dune II*, great, great game; set in the same kind of universe, kept the same characters and the same kind of planet, you know, we're still trying to harvest spice... and I go, well there's your perfect [example] right there.

How is the sequel going to be different?

It's kind of different game than the original *Outpost* as far as it's not this little tile placing game, it's not turn-based, it doesn't have that kind of a flow, with windows popping up in front of your face and having to micromanage [things]. But people will get in it [and] they'll recognize the buildings, they'll recognize the names, they'll recognize vehicles, they'll recognize the colony, they'll recognize things out of the research tree.... I think that people that played the first one will get in to this and go, "Wow! This is not just a straight sequel to the first one. It's a very different *kind* of game, but it's familiar," and then they'll play for a while and they'll go "Wow, this is a pretty cool game in it's own light." That's kind of what we're trying do. I'm trying to keep the good things out of the first *Outpost*, and throw all the other stuff out.

We're trying to keep a lot of things based on achievable science within the next 150 years; we're not going to see little green men popping out, and alien races. We're trying to stay within the story line of the first one.

The emphasis on this game is not the combat, not the fighting; it's the survival of your colony.... There are none of the missions where the objective is "kill everything else on the map." ... Sure, it's got some real-time combat in there, but that's not the emphasis. [However, when] you sit down to play multiplayer, what do people want to do? Well, kill everything else on the map, so if you set up in the multiplayer you can pick how you want to play.... You can set the winning conditions up, and on top of that you can play cooperatively or competitively.

You've got very specific mission objectives; this came from a lot of feedback on the first *Outpost*. People were very confused or frustrated or kind of lost, and thought "Well, what am I am I supposed to do?" The intent on that was, I believe, [to be] a "*SimCity* in Space" ... you [could] do *anything* you wanted to do, instead of doing specifically something they wanted you to do... so in each mission [in *Outpost 2*] there are very discrete objectives you must reach to accomplish the mission.

We [also] have several scenarios that we're building that are kind of open-ended. There's not another player on the planet. ... There's no time limit, there's no objective, so if you want to just start with your basic three or four buildings, then you can go build whatever you want to. ... In that sense, [these scenarios will be] a lot like what the original *Outpost* was.

Why even use the "Outpost" name, with the negative connotations with it? Was it because of the good story line in the background?

Oh, it's still on the same planet, you'll recognize a lot of the same vehicles, [the] same buildings are in there.... Ultimately if you play the game (and part of it is my twisted sense of irony), if you play this game right, the best way you can, you'll be leaving the planet with 200 people on a starship in search of a new place to set down for home and call Earth, and make a new Earth; the great irony of it to me is ... the original *Outpost* started with 200 people in a starship flying through space trying to start a colony... [we're] essentially trying to take [the game] full circle. The other part, too, is from a PR/marketing standpoint, it's guaranteed to get people to look at it! There was talk for a while after we'd made such major changes in the entire game ... about "let's just call it a completely different thing" [but] it's using the people that were there from the first game, it's using the technology, it's just played in a very different way and there's actually a game in it this time instead of like the first one. So *Outpost 2* is going to get attention because people want to go "well, let's see what they did *this* time!" I know we're going to lose sales to some people who go, "I'll never buy another *Outpost*" ... but I also think there are going to be a lot of people who say, "I've just *got* to see what they did with the second one!" and I think a lot of people will get in, they'll see it's a very different kind of game than the first one, and they'll realize "Wow! This is not like the first one" and then they'll play for a little while and realize... that this is a pretty cool game in-and-of itself. ■

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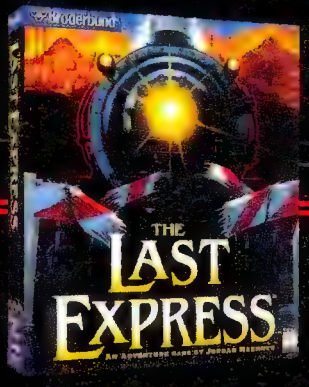
REACHES CONSTANTINOPLE WITH SURVIVORS.



aboard The Last Express™, a real-time adventure game by Jordan Mechner.

Bon voyage. www.lastexpress.com

Broderbund

Pacific General

SSI • Windows 95

The final sun in the Five Star constellation

◀ *Choose to play either the Allied campaign or the Japanese (Axis) campaign*

▲ *Naval activitiy close to shore; notice the differing water depths, from deep water to surf zones*

Starting with the most famous of its "General" games, *Panzer General*, SSI has been building the gaming constellation it refers to as the *Five Star Series* slowly but (relatively) surely. After *Panzer General* they hit something of a low in *Allied General* (more due, perhaps, to the awkward early Windows 95 implementation than to gameplay issues), came out strong again with *Fantasy General*, then had something of a disappointment in the most recent title, *Star General*. With the first game (*Panzer General II*) in a new series underway, it's time to close out the current *Five Star* line; given the metaphor of the series' title it is perhaps appropriate that the last game in the series will revolve around the Empire of the Rising Sun, namely, Japan, and war in the Pacific during World War II.

▲ *The Battle Generator is a welcome addition*

To cover the entire theatre of operations adequately, SSI is not limiting the game's coverage to the US/Japan portion of the War; instead, scenarios as early as 1936 and Japan's invasion of China will be included. The package will feature two complete campaign games and approximately 26 scenarios (although this number could shift). The Japanese campaign will let players fight their way across the Pacific, culminating in the invasion of San Francisco. The Allied campaign will include battles fought by many nations, including China, England, and, of course, the United States, and comes to a head with the invasion of Japan. Atomic weapons will apparently not play a part in the game; controversy aside, the fight for the Home Islands gives Allied players an ahistorical goal similar to the battle for San Francisco, and was felt to be more interesting from a gameplay standpoint.

Aside from China, warfare in the Pacific Theatre was largely divided into "small" land battles that were technically tactical or perhaps "grand tactical" in nature, and operational and strategic naval actions covering vast tracts of ocean. The types of scenarios you encounter in *Pacific General* reflect this duality; the one-hex island you see in what is largely a naval scenario might become a many-hex map for the invasion of said island. This approach was necessary to keep maps from being huge sprawls of blue hundreds of hexes to a side if using only the tactical scale, and to keep the land battles from being reduced to single hex die rolls when using the strategic scale. Of course, "scale" in the *Five Star* games has always been somewhat nebulous, so the primarily land-based China scenarios, which actually covered a fair amount of territory, won't be overwhelmingly huge.

...scenarios as early as 1936 and Japan's invasion of China will be included. The package will feature two complete campaign games and approximately 26 scenarios.

The naval combat has been completely reworked from the earlier games, and will include such things as air power (with the combat and reconnaissance ramifications that implies) and critical hit tables for each vessel (*i.e.*, attacks may result in hits on portions of a ship like its engine room, flight deck, or rudder, thereby crippling but not sinking it). Capital vessels are visually larger to help call them out on the maps, and will be more detailed visually than those seen in earlier *General* games. In the more tactical island invasion scenarios, ships are split between amphibious craft that can approach the shallow waters of an island and blue water vessels that must stand off. Naval actions will be numerous enough to almost refer to the game as *Pacific Admiral*.

Perhaps one of the biggest additions is a new Battle Generator that lets you develop scenarios for all theatres of the war (SSI will be including maps and units from both *Panzer General* and *Allied General*). Other features include a tutorial, a 3D sound-track that uses Q-Sound technology, multiplayer via modem or LAN, a high score system, and a unit glossary. Current plans call for a Pentium 90 or greater with 16 megs of RAM.

If development stays on schedule, *Pacific General* should hit stores early this Summer; only time and gameplay will tell whether SSI rounds out the *Five Star Series* with a super nova or a brown dwarf. –*Scott Udell*

If you play only one real RPG this year, it will have to be...

Fallout

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Carmageddon

Interplay • DOS

Where vehicular manslaughter is a source of entertainment

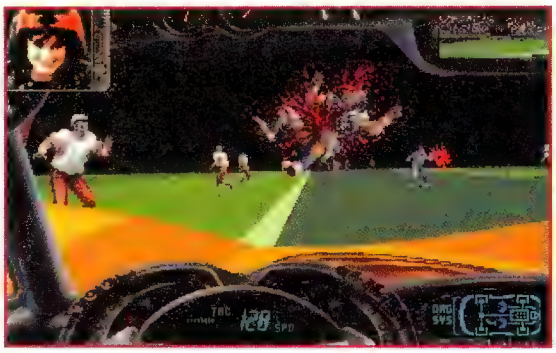
Pile-ups like this are as common as traffic jams on L.A. freeways. Only this is what you wish you could do while sitting in traffic ▶

This is a warning to parents out there–do not buy *Carmageddon* for your children. It's nasty. It's violent. It's depraved. It's sick. It's also shaping up to be one of the most promising action games coming down the pike this year. Such are life's little ironies…

Carmageddon is a hyper-violent racing game developed by SCi that's comically over the top with violence and gore. In fact, it's so violent it enters the realm of camp, in the style of Sam Raimi's deranged movie, *Evil Dead 2*. The game is a kind of a cross between *Quarantine* and *Destruction Derby*, though at this stage of development it's far superior to either of those games. *Carmageddon* gives you three different ways to win a race: you can win it outright, by completing X number of laps before your opponents, destroy all of your opponents or kill every single pedestrian in the environment (an unlikely proposition, when you consider that there can be more than 500).

Carmageddon is a timed racing game, but instead of incrementing the time when you reach the next checkpoint, you have to get bonus points to increase your time. You get them for doing things like damaging your opponents or by running into people (and cows). Yes, you got that right. Like the movie *Death Race 2000* you get points for hitting people; when you do, they explode in a mass of blood and body parts. You even track the blood around for a little while. Sound effects consist of various screams and squishes. Yum.

▲ *Splish splash. Your car emerges from the depths of the sea, only to surprise a beach bunny*



▲ *You think football is violent, wait until you drive onto this field and take out a few steroid-addled jocks*

…the perfect way to unwind after a long commute.

A general thread of black humor runs through the game, lest anyone forget that it's all in good fun. For example, rewards for particularly inspiring deaths are bonuses for "extra style" or "artistic impression." Those inevitable flips and spins can result in a "cunning style bonus." Power-ups range from the typical (full repairs, extra time) to the bizarre (a "jelly" suspension, a "pinball" effect, whereby your car bounces off of walls and such, replete with sound effects, or the "pedestrian extro-bastard ray").

All of this wackiness would be irrelevant if the game weren't fun to play, so the developers are working especially hard on the physics of the gameworld. The handling of the vehicle is more like a traditional race game than the *CarDOOM* feel of *Quarantine*; the feel is dead-on, and you can do all sorts of slick stunts, like the *Rockford Files'* "go in reverse, do a 180 degree spin, and continue forward" move. Unlike, say, *Destruction Derby 2*, all of the flips and flying that your car can go through don't feel overdone, though certain speed-enhancing power-ups like turbo or "hot rod" will make you fly up in the air like you'll never see in reality. Unlike most other race games, the environment is quite interactive–you can take out trees, gas pumps newspaper stands and lord knows what else.

The game will ship with an astonishingly generous 99 (yes, 99) tracks. The opposing cars feature excellent AI, with each car showing distinct styles. Some will try to outrun you, while others will immediately turn around and try to destroy everyone else. What makes them particularly tough is that they remember if you've gone after them, and will pay you back accordingly. Their single-minded devotion to carnage is just one of the things being tuned before the game's July ship-date. Also planned is a high-resolution graphics mode, FMV cut scenes and special network-only tracks for the six-player networking. A DOS-based game, *Carmageddon* supports IPX, so Internet play may be limited to Kali and other IPX-emulators.

With *Carmageddon* and *Redneck Rampage*, it would appear that Interplay is taking the low road to PC entertainment. It's easy to be controversial, so these games will hopefully be judged by their quality, not their subject matter. Unless things go *really* wrong in the next few months, it's already clear that *Carmageddon* will be the perfect way to unwind after a long commute. –*Steve Bauman*

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Old World or New: Achieving empire either way

Imperialism

SSI • Windows 95, Macintosh

▲ *Setting trade policies is just one of the many diplomatic activities you can engage in*

Do you like *Civilization* but feel that it was just too broad in scope for your tastes? Do you like games like *Risk* or even SSI's *Colonial Conquest*, but feel their military emphasis was a tad shallow? Or perhaps you're just looking for a game that lets you be a major player on the world stage during the last great era of empires, the 19th century. If any of these describe your gaming tastes, then SSI's upcoming *Imperialism* is a game you'll want to keep an eye on.

In the game you take on the role of leader of one of seven major powers out to achieve world dominance via Old World (military) or New World (economic) means (with adept political maneuvering needed for either approach). While the terrain is randomized in the game, the settings portrayed look a lot like 19th century Earth, complete with three general phases of development: a Napoleonic (musket-based) period; a Civil War period (with the rise of the rifle); and a Prussian/Pre-WW I period (with machine guns and bolt-action weapons). You will jostle for supremacy with the six other powers, trying to bring the sixteen minor powers into *your* sphere of influence through a combination of economics, diplomacy, and outright war. Every 25 years or so the world's Council of Ministers will meet to determine who is closest to achieving world dominion, either via undisputed economic might or the unpleasant presence of occupying armies.

▲ *Your capital city, the heart of your economy*

▲ *A developed nation, with the tentacles of a land-based empire (railroads) reaching in all directions*

The economic model is a core feature of the game, and one that can't be ignored even if military conquest is your preferred approach (although computer "ministers" can help automate things). To simplify gameplay, all production is handled via your capital city, where you invest in new or upgraded engines of economy such as textile plants or steel mills. Send prospectors out to survey for minerals, and have engineers build railways and ports to improve the movement of materials into your capital and the movement of goods out. Resources and commodities drive your economy and affect each game differently; you may *wish* to corner the world market on steel production, but without the coal from that upstart minor power you will be foiled. Should you try to sweet talk them, or just invade? Do that, though, and their major power ally with the big navy may choke off your steel shipments. Technology advances will occur at times throughout the game; SSI's Carl Norman tells us that it will be very difficult to win the game by the time of the first meeting of the Council, so your ability to keep your economy up with the latest trends will be a major part of your success. As the Industrial Revolution advances, your workers begin to demand more creature comforts, so you'll have to redirect some (profitable) trade to them to keep production up. You'll also train workers in new skills, which means an investment in educational facilities.

The economic model is closely tied with the diplomatic model, which is almost as involved. Keep a close eye on relations throughout the world so you'll know where to direct your economic or military efforts. Carrots and sticks work, but expect them to be slippery and hard to handle; diplomacy requires finesse (or sneakiness, depending on your definition).

Military conquest is a most viable approach to world domination in *Imperialism*. With a properly tuned economy, SSI tells us you'll be able to form many unit types, from light infantry to artillery to naval steamers. At a strategic level, military units garrison regions within a country (not squares or hexagons); you can march them across country, one region per turn, or you can invest in a transportation infrastructure to move them vast distances in a single turn. Battle can either be a simplified affair, as in games like *Civilization*, or (optionally) played out in tactical mode. While not in the version of the game we have, Norman describes the tactical mode as a somewhat simplified *Panzer General*-like system; in other words, more involved than the tactical mode in *Conquest of the New World* but not as complex as a full-up wargame.

Multiplayer will be supported via modem or LAN (up to all seven major powers), but Internet play is not planned. System requirements are a 90MHz Pentium or greater, or an 80MHz PowerPC or above; on both systems you'll need 16 meg of RAM. J.P. Morgan and Bismarck, look out: gamers get their chance at *Imperialism* this Fall. –*Scott Udell*

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Extreme Assault

BlueByte • DOS

Big choppers + big guns = big explosions

◀ *MMX gives you better explosion effects*

We were first shown what has become *Extreme Assault* last spring at the E3 show. After being suitably impressed by beta versions of *Albion* and *Archimedean Dynasty*, our BlueByte tour guide beckoned us into the dim depths of the booth. There, he reverently unveiled *Level X*, their new helicopter game. We were… well, the terrain was really nice. At that stage, the "game" consisted of a chopper and some wicked rolling terrain. Today, *Level X*, now *Extreme Assault*, is nearing completion. The terrain still looks fabulous–amazing, even–but now there's a solid game to play, too.

Before the simulation *grognards* start salivating too wildly, lets make one thing clear. This isn't a helicopter sim. It's an arcade game (console owners will feel delightfully at home) featuring a vehicle which looks like a helicopter (or a tank, in some missions). In fact, the vehicle flies more like your ship in *Descent* than a real world helicopter. And as in *Descent*, the keyboard offers better control than a joystick (though it may just be that, with joystick in hand, you keep wanting the craft to control like a helicopter).

Your missions take place across six operation zones. Within each zone you'll fly a series of short missions, (about 50 total, we're told, plus multiplayer is promised for final) each with specific goals and a designated fly (or drive) area. Fly out of the area for too long and you'll fail the mission. BlueByte has used these artificial boundaries to turn up the heat, as you'll learn as soon as you undertake your first mission: taking on two enemy choppers in a postage stamp-sized bit of airspace. Each operation zone provides a dynamic landscape, and areas you've scorched in one mission will remain that way in the next.

Clutching the "action" label more tightly to its breast, BlueByte has littered the landscape with power-ups and shield recharges. These may be found in some hidden nook, or they may be left behind in the swirling debris that used to be an enemy. All told, we're promised nine power levels for each of three weapons (a laser, a cannon, and guided missiles).

▲ *Here's a dramatic shot of an impending attack*

▲ *This shot of the other vehicle you can control, the tank, shows off a number of slick 3D effects, like transparent fire and water*

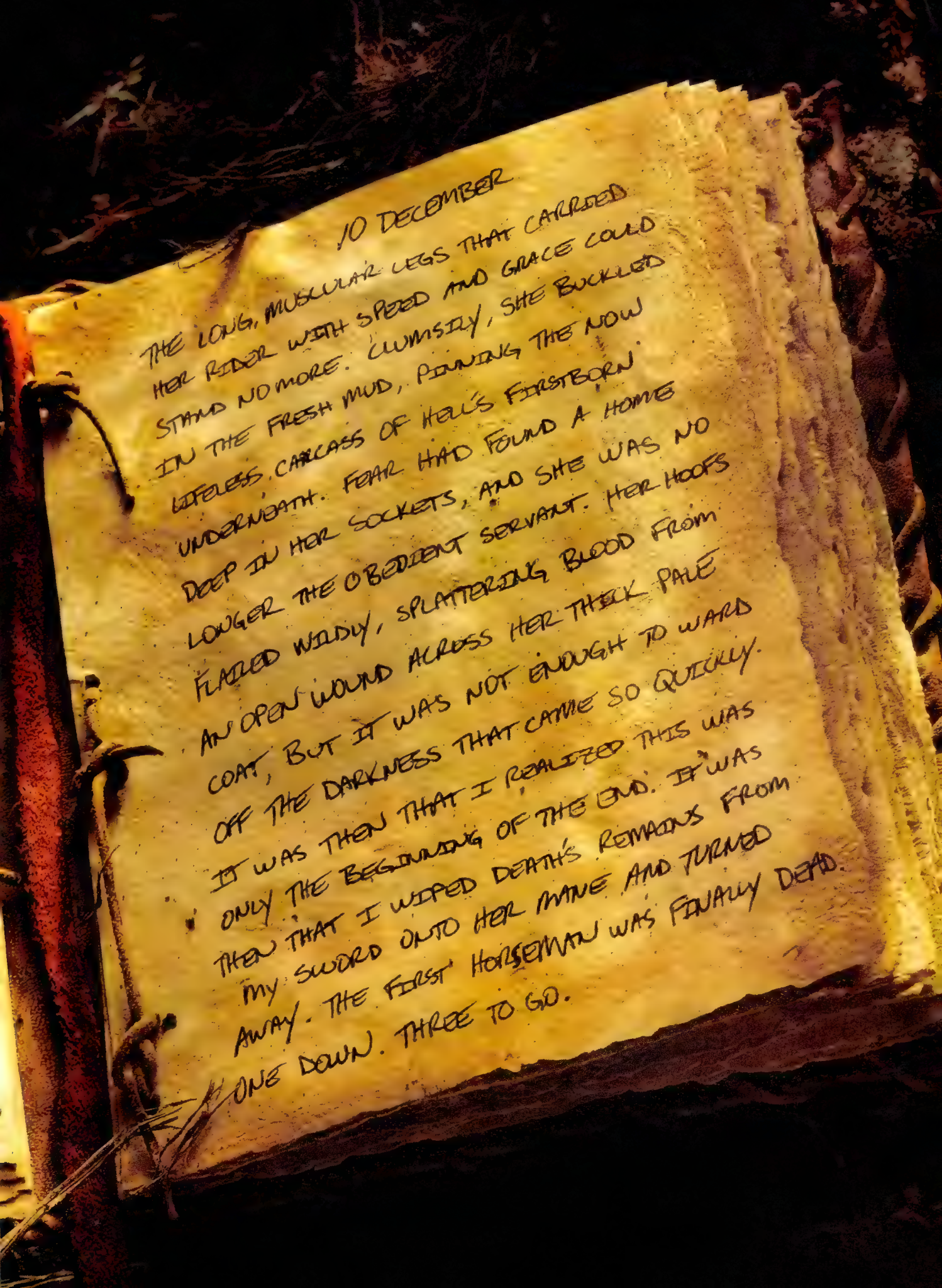
Fly over a crest and look down a vertical wall to a valley floor, and your jaw is suddenly hitting the floor.

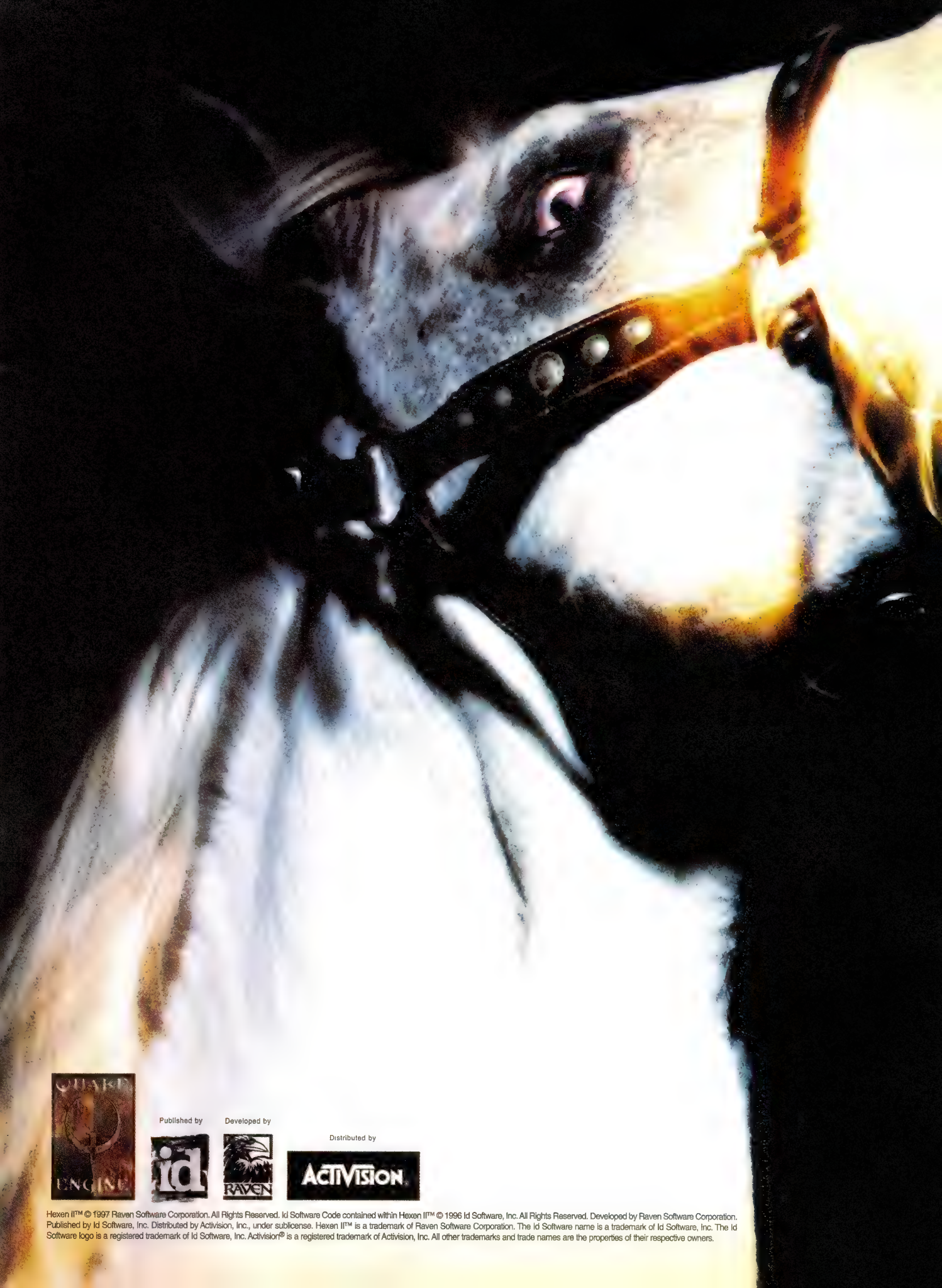
The environment is of course fully 3D, to the point where the plummeting remains of a chopper might catch on the eaves of a rooftop below. Blue Byte takes pride in pointing out that their engine has no need of a 3D accelerator card, and no such support is offered, but an MMX-enabled version of the game is being worked on and should be included in the final package. As stunning as the game looks now, it's almost frightening to think about how much better it would look when combined with both MMX and 3Dfx technologies. The MMX version looks quite a bit like the non-MMX version, but has more special effects, such as transparent smoke and special lighting.

It is, however, hard to find fault with BlueByte's philosophy, because *Extreme Assault* is by far the nicest looking non-accelerated game on the market, with high-resolution, 16-bit color graphics and a smooth frame rate (much like *Archimedean Dynasty*). Polygonal vehicles are texture mapped expertly enough that you *won't* mutter "nice texture mapping" when you play. In other words, it is so good it's transparent. As mentioned, the terrain is awe-inspiring. Fly over a crest and look down a vertical wall to a valley floor, and your jaw is suddenly hitting the floor.

The environment is almost totally interactive. Trees burst into flame when hit with fire. Bullets stitch across a wall leaving behind a pockmarked reminder of the horrors of war, and enemy vehicles blow up *so* nicely.

All is not perfect. The controls require some acclimation, due to the fact that the chopper doesn't fly like a chopper. But then, this *is* a beta and BlueByte is listening to feedback. By the time *Extreme Assault* hits store shelves it may be damned near the perfect arcade blast-a-thon. It is already a total kick to play, and looks better than anything like it now on the market. –*Peter Smith*


10 DECEMBER
THE LONG, MUSCULAR LEGS THAT CARRIED
HER RIDER WITH SPEED AND GRACE COULD
STAND NO MORE. CLUMSILY, SHE BUCKLED
IN THE FRESH MUD, PINNING THE NOW
LIFELESS CARCASS OF HELL'S FIRSTBORN
UNDERNEATH. FEAR HAD FOUND A HOME
DEEP IN HER SOCKETS, AND SHE WAS NO
LONGER THE OBEDIENT SERVANT. HER HOOFS
FLAILED WILDLY, SPLATTERING BLOOD FROM
AN OPEN WOUND ACROSS HER THICK PALE
COAT, BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO WARD
OFF THE DARKNESS THAT CAME SO QUICKLY.
IT WAS THEN THAT I REALIZED THIS WAS
ONLY THE BEGINNING OF THE END. IT WAS
THEN THAT I WIPED DEATH'S REMAINS FROM
MY SWORD ONTO HER MANE AND TURNED
AWAY. THE FIRST HORSEMAN WAS FINALLY DEAD.
ONE DOWN. THREE TO GO.



Published by id

Developed by RAVEN

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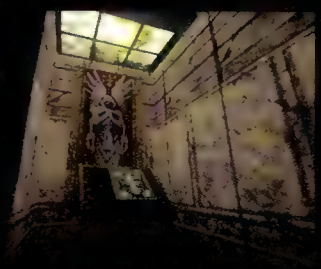
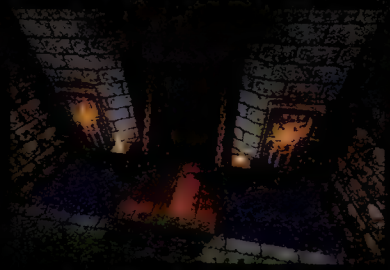
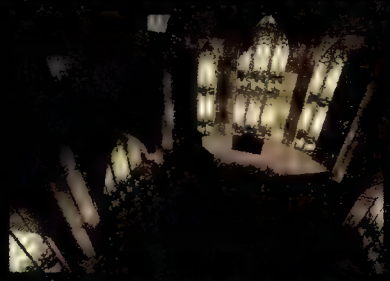


Possess distinct spells, powers and weapons. With experience, gain levels, more hit points and certain abilities that apply to your specific character class, such as increased speed, fire power and jump distance.



Lose yourself in lightning storms, blowing leaves, earthquakes, spraying fountains and pouring rain.



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NASCAR Racing goes online, with NASCAR and TEN along for the ride

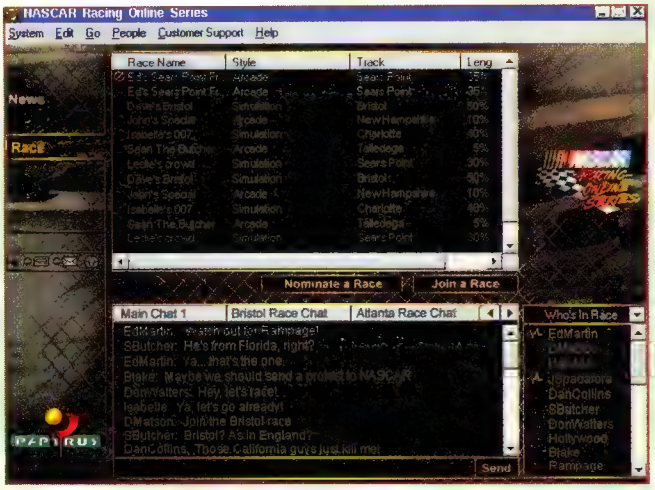
When *NASCAR Racing Online* (NRO) goes online some time this summer, it will be the 13th officially sanctioned series of NASCAR, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing and the governing body of such series as the Winston Cup (by far the most popular form of racing, and one of the most watched sports, in the US), Busch Grand National and Craftsman Truck Series.

No one was more surprised about NASCAR's full involvement than Papyrus' Ed Martin, the Series Director for NRO, who first contacted them solely to get their permission to put the game *NASCAR Racing* on Papyrus' planned online server, code-named "Hawaii." That service was to be a dial-in service, based in Papyrus' office, that would allow races for up to 30 human drivers.

"We took the concept [to NASCAR] in the hopes of extending our royalty rate to include the online service. The meeting was with Brian France, the grandson of Bill France Sr., the founder of NASCAR, and he says, 'Y'know, I don't want to do that. Let me tell you what I do want. I want to create *NASCAR Online*, and it's going to be the 13th sanctioned NASCAR series.'

"We said, 'You want to do what?' After reading their proposal, we realized we hadn't done enough, because they were ready to offer real prizes, just like the rest of the series; [they envisioned] something much bigger, something that was scaleable for thousands of races and people at a time."

In the development of Hawaii, Sierra purchased Papyrus, and they were able to use their parent company's experience with the original *Imagination Network* to help them plan the service. The original reason for doing their own server was to eliminate the latency inherent in Internet gaming, something that every multiplayer gamer is all-too aware of. However, the Internet boom had begun, so they had to find a low-latency service provider, and that search led them to TEN (the *Total Entertainment Network*).



Left: Extensive chat facilities will be built in to the interface of NRO. It's here where you'll set up your races, and people will be able to join, based on their skill level. You can tell this is a bogus chat session – no one's talking about sex.

Below: Imagine the entertainment potential of 30 human drivers racing over the net

NRO will feature multiple skill levels of racing, broken down on a track-by-track basis, with separate classes for arcade and simulation races. The server will track crashes, lap times and the skill levels of opposing drivers to assist in the ranking of every driver. Everyone starts with a ranking of zero, and a driver who consistently beats those with a higher skill level will move up. The points awarded to drivers will also reflect the skill levels of all of those who participate. If a driver with a skill level of five beats a field of drivers with two, he'd get fewer points than if he'd beat a field of fellow fives.

The tracking of "incident points" will be used to help keep things civil. There's the obvious possibility of frustration for online drivers if there's one guy in each race who always wants to drive backwards and take out a bunch of cars. Too many incident points, for crashes and such, can cause your skill level to go down. The game will also track drivers who spend a wee-bit too much time facing the wrong direction and will send them to the pits. If they do it twice, they get a black flag. Habitual crashers can be tossed out of the league.

Another advantage of virtual racing are the replays. The server tracks every car in every position on the track, meaning you'll never miss the replay of that crash or pass. Because it tracks every game variable down to the millisecond, cheating should be nearly impossible. If someone figures out a way to have tires that never wear out, the computer will know. If they figure out a way to tighten the suspension, the computer will know. Just as NASCAR impounds random cars at the end of a race looking for violations, Papyrus will automatically retrieve five replays to check for cheating.

Beyond the things discussed here, there are even more possibilities for this series in the realm of sponsorship and cross-promotion. NASCAR's involvement has made NRO the first "virtual" simulation to receive official backing by a major sports organization, and it's things like this that will help to legitimize online gaming. Consider this–the year end photograph of all of the NASCAR series winners could include, nestled among the likes of Jeff Gordon, Dale Earnhardt or Rusty Wallace, one Bobby Schmekler, age 13, of Podunk, North Dakota. What's next–the Air Force giving promotions based on pilot kills in *Warbirds*? *–Steve Bauman*

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Command Post

A Spring-time grab bag

The first couple of months of the year are usually pretty dead when it comes to new releases, and we're either catching up on all the stuff that piled on us around the holidays or bemoaning the lack of new titles to feed our urge for something different. Patient software watchers (like bird watchers, but found in stores and on the 'net), however, can be rewarded by some titles that they might have missed during the great game migrations around Christmas, or that might have held off until the hawks and falcons and owls of gaming have come and gone. I thought I'd let you know of a few that have come to rest in this editor's office.

[1] Hong Kong Mahjong from Nine Dragons Software

[2] Harpoon II Admiral's Edition–you can use the new platform editor to customize ships

[3] Dragons in the Mist

Perhaps the biggest fowl in this gaming coop is *Command & Conquer Gold* for Windows 95. If you missed the game that started the real-time craze, then here it is; despite the rush of real-time strategy titles (32 at last count), it's hard to top. New in this version are the higher resolution sported by *Red Alert* and the easier multiplayer options; the *C&C* desktop "theme" pack is also included. Surprisingly for a title now well over a year old, they did not bundle the *Covert Missions* expansion to *C&C*, although this version is compatible with it.

People with a taste for games competitive but not combative may want to check out *Hong Kong Mahjong* from Nine Dragons Software. Not a mahjong player myself, I can't really evaluate the gameplay of the characters (they all whupped me), but the package seems pretty complete. The on-line tutorial is okay but not great, the interface is a little clunky (especially for those who don't know the game), and the tiny video clips of your opponents aren't the best, but the actual gameboard, pieces and game actions seem fine (a note, however: this game really likes to run in 24 bit color; it looks awful with just 256 colors). The publisher can be contacted by web at www.ninedragons.com, by phone at 415-664-3474, or by snail-mail at 351 Ulloa Street, San Francisco, CA 94127.

Wargamers may be interested in the *Harpoon II Admiral's Edition*; yes, the game I thought would never see light has actually slipped into stores... and right into the bargain bins. Most reports have it at around $20 if you can find it (distribution seems spotty). This package has all the Battlesets–including one never released and the scenario design contest winners–and the platform editor to let you design your own ships. What it does *not* have is a paper manual; while full documentation is included on CD, beginners may find it daunting (but beginners will probably want to go with I-Magic's *Harpoon Classic '97* anyway).

HPS has sent us the latest–and last–installment of the current *Panthers in the Shadows* series. Called *Dragons in the Mist*, it covers combat in the Pacific and Asian Theatres from 1938-1945, and adds extensive Japanese, Chinese, Australian, Soviet, and even Dutch tables of organization and equipment to the engine. It includes seven scenarios (Tarawa, Kwajalein, Changkufeng, etc.) and several blank maps for build-your-own. One weakness: the README notes that the AI has trouble dealing intelligently with the islands while setting up its units, and the designers recommend you do it for the AI (something which lessens the "fog of war"). While the game comes as a full install, it's being marketed as an add-on (at $25) for owners of *Panthers* or *Tigers on the Prowl 2*; you need the manual from these games both for instructions and copy protection.

SSI has released their first add-on pack to *Age of Rifles*, and while I haven't dug far into it I can see already that some of the problems I griped about in my review have been fixed (including the lack of random battle generation). The package includes three new campaigns (British Colonial Indian Mutany, Wars of Italian Unification, Hood's Drive North) and some 30 individual scenarios (including my recent battle of interest, Wilson's Creek). For more modern fields of battle they have the campaign disk for *Steel Panthers II*, but the new executable included with it is apparently not the full patch that's available on SSI's web site, so you'll want to get that as well.

As the end of March (and a fiscal quarter) nears quite a bit more "big" titles are coming out, but we'll try to slip in some sightings of the smaller birds throughout the year. *–Scott Udell*

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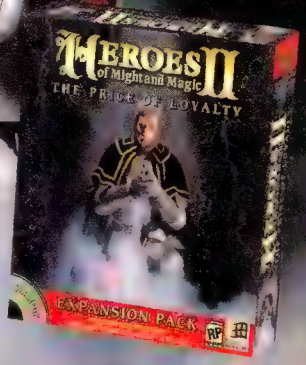

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Studio 3DO

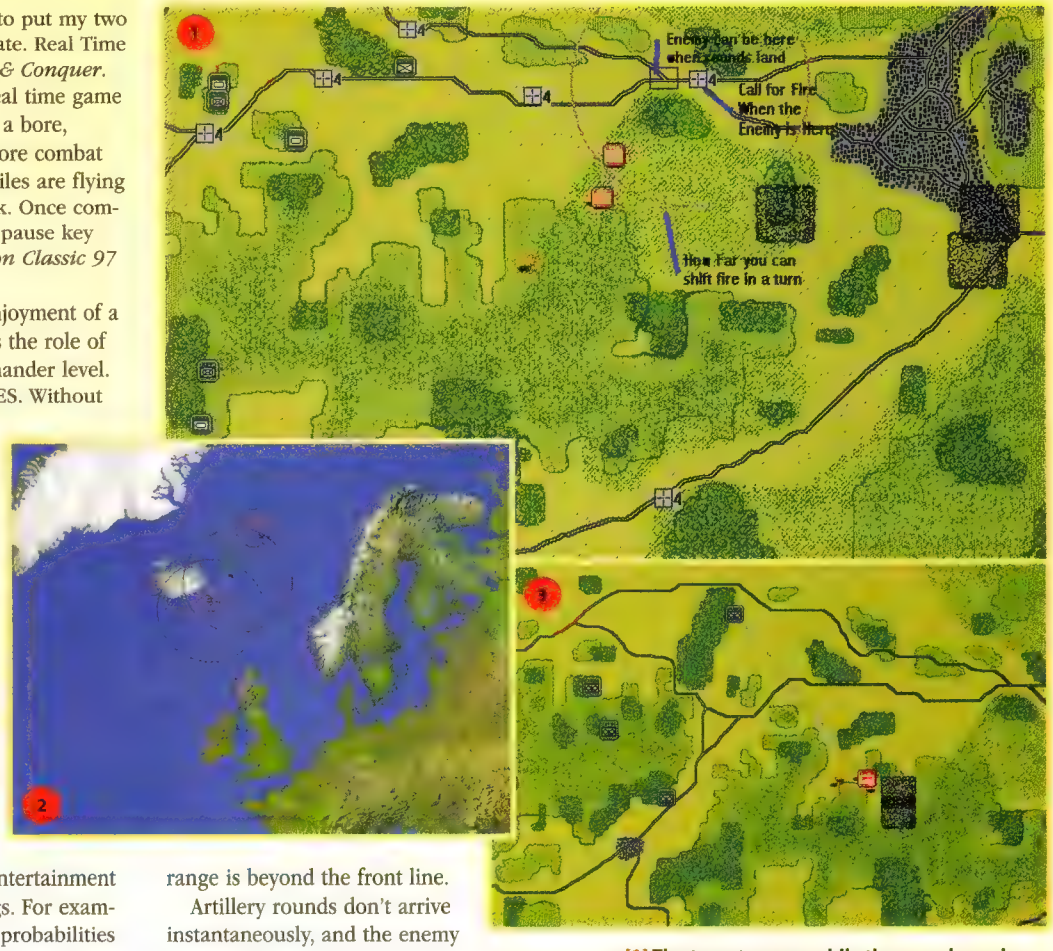
On War

Real time, turns, and military acceptance

I've decided it's time for me to put my two cents into the real time debate. Real Time didn't start with *Command & Conquer*. *Harpoon (Classic)* is the first real time game I recall, and it is a challenge or a bore, depending on the situation. Before combat starts, it's boring; once the missiles are flying there's not enough time to think. Once combat starts, many players want a pause key (the February review of *Harpoon Classic 97* mentioned this).

Turns are essential for the enjoyment of a game where the player assumes the role of anything above company commander level. Why? STAFF and SUBORDINATES. Without their help, only time allows a player to accomplish the many functions necessary to win. Even company commanders have staff: Executive Officer, Platoon Leaders, First Sergeant, NBC NCO, Supply NCO, Maintenance NCO, and a Fire Support Team.

On a related note, in the March issue, there was a question about why the US Military doesn't use more entertainment software. Well, many games are used by military schools around the nation, but as a training tool, entertainment software has some shortcomings. For example, *TacOps* adjusts hit and kill probabilities to make it "fairer," only has two levels of terrain, and only allows two players. Training simulations allow a unit's subordinate commanders to play the game while their commander works in his Tactical Operations Center. Military simulations may have over a hundred workstations and multiple sides in a single game. However, there are many instances where entertainment software is ahead of DOD simulations in presentation and interface.



[1] The target moves while the rounds are in the air

[2] Where's the Pause Key?

[3] Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (SEAD) swith helicopters

Adjusting rounds

We can use artillery as an example of how staff help a commander. Historically, artillery is one of the main killers on the battlefield, and is critical to success. Many tasks must be accomplished in order to bring "Steel on Target," including target detection, calling for and adjusting fire, setting priorities, keeping the guns in range, and computing firing data. In most games, all the player must do is keep artillery in range and direct their fire. How many of you have failed to keep it in range so it's available when you need it? As a rule of thumb, artillery locates so two-thirds of its range is beyond the front line.

Artillery rounds don't arrive instantaneously, and the enemy moves in the time interval between when it's called for and when it arrives (Time to Transmit = the request + time to approve it + time to compute firing data + load the guns + time of flight). Figure 2 shows this relationship. TRP1 shows where the enemy was when I called for fire, and TRP2 shows where he was when it hit. While some games allow you to shift your aiming points, a good eye and a sense for movement factors is required to use FA effectively.

Air support presents a similar problem. In addition to playing commander and forward observer, you're also the air liaison officer. Planes don't respond as fast as artillery, and are easier to destroy. Some games allow you to adjust the aiming point, but it's essential to learn to judge where to place the impact point so the right target is hit. Even so, sometimes pilots don't hit the right target. This frustrates the player, but is realistic. Pilots have a hard time picking out targets on the ground, especially if they are stationary. Of course, precision guided munitions improve the chances of a hit. If the game permits, launch the aircraft, then have them loiter closer to the target to reduce their response time.

Suppression of Enemy Air Defense

In my Air Defense series a few months ago, I showed the tremendous amount of ADA the OPFOR has to protect his units against our air attack. Players must suppress or kill enemy ADA for air strikes to have any effect on the game. The quickest way is to kill them with direct or indirect fire. Another method is to first use attack helicopters to kill ADA systems, then let the airplanes work over the rest of the enemy formation. (Figure 3) Other games allow the player to use an anti-radiation missile to kill the radar, rendering an ADA battery useless.

Next time we'll continue our observations concerning ground combat in the modern era. *–Michael K. Robel*

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Where Serra Angels fear to tread

Magic: The Gathering

MicroProse

Windows 95, NT 4.0

★★★★½

Imagine what the world would be like if it followed the rules of *Magic: The Gathering*. Just try to convince me that walking into work, tapping four mana, and casting "Gaseous Form" on your boss (and "Jump" on the secretary) wouldn't be unsettlingly satisfying. Having a baby, but the kid comes out looking like a rabid wombat? Thank goodness you remembered to bring "Unsummon" to the delivery room. Gramps breathing his last? "Animate Artifact" will keep that old codger around for awhile.

Even if life refuses to comply with the rules of *Magic*, MicroProse has done a stellar job adapting the incredibly popular card game to your PC. Covering every facet of the original card game in painstaking detail, while adding a complete adventure game portion to challenge even veteran players, *Magic: The Gathering* is just what the Samite Healer ordered.

First, a quick background on the game. Debuting in the mid-90s from Wizards of the Coast, *Magic* cards sell into the billions. Hundreds of unique cards are available through expansion packs, and the game's addicting nature convinces several school districts across America to ban it (hey, who would *you* want for your Civics teacher, Mr. Smeldergras or Uncle Istvan? "Si Si Oh Playmate" this ain't).

For the beginner, the game provides a tutorial adorned with the Macromedia logo that actually doesn't suck. Through a series of chapters, first time players learn the steps of dueling from two smart-alecky wizards maintaining a curious affinity for slapping their capes across their forearms. Corny? Oh yeah. Useful, though? You betcha.

Every possible provision for playing the game is thoroughly researched and accurately represented in this computerized version. Players can create decks from many of the cards up through the 4th Edition sets, even going so far as to include the infamous Mox's, Black Lotus, and the Ken Griffey, Jr. Rookie card (though its casting cost may be prohibitive).

Building decks from scratch may sound like the elusive hobby you've been eagerly awaiting since the feds took away your "Jowls of the World" collection, but in reality it's a prelude to the very heart of the entire game: The Duel. Skeptics who refused to believe that MicroProse could successfully create the dueling environment will be dismayed to find their concerns unfounded. The actual dueling

[1] The Deck Builder Utility includes over 400 cards, including the infamous restricted cards
[2] Once the archers realize the black knight is really a pinata, the scramble for goodies begins
[3] Shandalar comes alive through towns and cities. Notice the division from swamp to forest
[4] Killer bees are "pumpable" for added strength. Sorta like steroids, only no NCAA investigation

screen looks marvelous, with a clear bias for the organization freak. Every included card is stunningly rendered from the original artwork. Different areas such as your graveyard, life points, and current hand are logically positioned so that essential information for dueling always remains visible. At the same time, plenty of real estate exists on-screen for arranging the cards in play however you wish. Included shortcuts like double-clicking a card to automatically tap the necessary mana; right-clicking to get a complete description of anything in the game; and the ability to by-pass currently dormant phases of your turn all replace the drudgery of repetitive game mechanics with a streamlined gaming affair.

Shandalar, the adventure portion of *Magic*, removes any notion that this game is just a simple port of the original. Starting with an almost random set of cards, players travel (or in the initial stages, scurry like naked banshees to the safety of towns in fear for their lives) across the world of Shandalar via a top-down view. Along the way, you'll trade in less useful cards for better ones, duel the many creatures of the land, and complete quests ranging from "find my dentures" to "Kill that stupid sorcerer who keeps mistaking my poodle for a breathalyzer machine." Ultimately, you'll do battle "magi a magi" with five other wizards vying for the usual perks world domination offers.

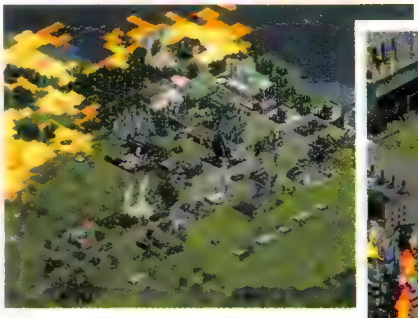
It's this portion of the game that, from an entertainment perspective, really shines. Deviating from the standard "Mox, Death, Kill" strategy duels often migrate towards, Shandalar is much more situational in its deck building aspects. A deck comprised of direct damage spells might send a Troll Shaman spiraling into the cataclysmic depths of perpetual *Eight is Enough* episodes, but won't touch the Ghostly Specter Of J.P. Patches with his Circle of Protection:Red. It's this variant of tailoring your deck to any given foe which gives Shandalar lasting value. Every time you start a game, the quests, monsters, places, and starting cards change dramatically. In perfect Sid Meier fashion, there's plenty of helpful feedback; a diary of your past feats and accolades keeps the fires of accomplishment burning through quest after quest. In *Civilization* there never was a night (out of many, many nights) when the tantalizing promise of an important discovery wasn't just a "few more turns away." In *Magic*, that fiery desire to finish just one more quest will once again stifle Mother Earth's gross planetary potential for sleeping pills.

All this grandeur would be moot were it not for a capable and hearty AI to match wits against. Not to confuse "capable" with "per-

fect," mind you; the AI does have quirks which allow for some bizarre "gimmies" when playing. Given the scope of the card game, however, the computer opponent plays admirably, all factors considered. With 400+ card types to track, all with special effects, abilities and timing issues, programming the interaction of these cards for all phases of gameplay is no small feat. Fortunately, the team at MicroProse have risen to the occasion; they've made sure the computer opponent presents a viable threat for a broad spectrum of *Magic* players.

With all its good points, *Magic* does unfortunately fail on several counts. First, the AI, plagued with blemishes when encountering certain cards, renders those cards useless. A flaw exists in the tutorial concerning the blocking of attackers, a critical component of the game. A patch for known bugs is pending (aren't they always?). Secondly, multi-player capability remains absent until at least late this year when the first expansion pack debuts. Still, this shouldn't be a tremendous hurdle, given the current crop of freeware programs which allow players to duel over the Internet (so far, *Apprentice32* seems the hands-down winner.)

Make no mistake, however. Once *Magic: The Gathering* clutches you in its grasp, all thought of escape dissolves into a series of endless duels and shrieks of terror as that coveted ante card tromps off into the forest, possessed by a new and grumpier owner. Perhaps you could never imagine a card game which didn't have "Summon Visa" and "Summon Mastercard" in its repertoire. Or maybe you play weekend tournaments and terrorize children with your Weenie… Horde deck. Whatever your stake in life, this game will entrap you into its lair of wits and wizardry. "Abandon Sleep, All Ye Who Enter Here." –*Tim Royal*



Enemy Nations

Enemy Nations

Windward Studios

Windows

★★★★☆

Time to gnash your teeth and shake your fist. In *Enemy Nations*, set in the distant future, you assume real time command of any one of a motley group of races, controlling their research, construction, and battles. The plot of the game is that the governments of… well, who really cares–your colony ship drops on the planet–explore, exploit, expand, and exterminate.

If you've played this type of a game before, you can jump right in without too much scratching of the head. The manual is easy to read but does lack detail on race abilities, unit statistics, and research information. Tutorial scenarios have limited objectives and are notable because they carry over all the research, resources and vehicles from the last scenario. Definitely appreciated are the random, edge-less worlds that are created. You may start with the bare minimum of materials and vehicles or with a full complement, allowing you to quickly boost your military or economy.

Resources you have to deal with include food, lumber, iron, coal, steel, xilitium, oil, gas, and power. Your trucks are a vital component in the success of your economy as they transport most of these materials. "Auto-routing" for these trucks is well done and generally leaves you free to handle other operations. Pay attention to your resources early in the game. A time or two I was left in a lurch – I had no steel left and no smelter to manufacture it and, therefore, no way to get more.

The interface is effective, colorful, and easy to use. Various icons indicate what is needed and supplied and tool bars issue commands quickly. Separate vehicle and building menus are provided and you can use some handy short-cut keys. You have to scroll the map using scroll bars or holding a mouse button–not as easy as the mouse-pointer-only method.

Research only begins when you build–get this–a research facility. You research one topic at a time, although you can switch with a penalty at any time. Without guidance from research trees or detailed information, however, I picked research topics almost willy-nilly. There are no continued warnings a research topic has been completed and since you are not forced to choose a new topic, it is easy to forget, wasting valuable research time.

Combat, in all its visual and auditory glory, is generally standard fare but there are some interesting additions. Damaged buildings operate at a lower level of efficiency and units suffer a decrease in accuracy and rate of fire. Units have fields of fire and some can move and fire simultaneously. Your forces will defend themselves if attacked but sometimes do not have the guts to initiate an attack on a nearby unit without prompting from you.

The configurable graphics, sounds, and music are excellent. There are great visuals of fire, smoke, and blackened vehicles and the sounds of battle are exciting. You have to steady yourself as you try to work the economy and assign research as you hear the battles continue. You will also be informed of events by creative voices from a variety of ages and personalities. This is a refreshing departure from the stereotypical voices used in other games of this genre.

The computer AI maybe doesn't "cheat" but it is granted additional race bonuses in higher difficulty levels. Computer opponents will not behave the same way each time, creating an air of anxious uncertainty–I have been surprised and humiliated. Even so, human players are preferred, of course, and easy to find since *Enemy Nations* supports a variety of multi-player options. Only an embassy will allow you to specify relations with others and to exchange buildings and vehicles. If you want to send private E-mail, some research is required; until then only global chat is available, making early secret alliances and coordination impossible.

There are many more good points than bad points about *Enemy Nations*. Although I unearthed a few minor bugs and acknowledge there is room for improvement, it is a solid source of fun, excitement, and great visuals. I can honestly say I'll be playing this one even after this article is done. If you want to loose sleep, strain your relationships, and succumb to a new addiction, then play *Enemy Nations*. –*Michael Bowen*

Fallen Haven

Interactive Magic

Windows 95

★★★★☆

Why is it that wherever earthlings go in this universe, there's always some other violent amniotic culture just waiting to rain on the celestial parade? Consider *Fallen Haven* from Interactive Magic no exception to this exasperating rule. As the story goes, citizens of Earth have decided that if one habitable planet is good, more is better. So off go the more (or less) intelligent beings to a new land called Haven. And the people rejoiced. And there was much singing. Particularly "Uptown Girl." Then the Taurans arrived. They hate songs. Especially Billy Joel songs. War is imminent.

Whichever side you choose to play, the game has a lot to offer along the lines of good, clean, simple fun. As a turn-based strategy game, *Fallen Haven* offers two modes of play. The first is a strategic portion, where players shuttle forces, build up their colonies, and launch attacks. When invasion of a province takes place, the game reverts to a tactical mode, wherein combat occurs between opposing forces (sound a lot like *X-Com*? Shhh… don't tell).

Fans of *This Means War* (all three of you) will be right at home with the game's polished chromium look. The world map divides into 21 provinces, all with different productivity ratings for energy, mining, and research. Each province has a different terrain "theme," from desert plains to lush jungles to snow-capped mountains. In each territory, building up colonies capable of defending themselves is just as critical to success as victories achieved during battle.

As futuristic tokens of war, every available unit type looks and acts unique. The fine-tuned balance of the game makes certain that no one unit type is immune to all others. Rangers are great for long range sniping, but dissolve into shimmering plasma puddles if an enemy unit tosses a pine cone in their general vicinity. On the other hand, a Tauran light tank can take several hits, but for dishing out damage can do little more than write "Wash me" on an enemy's windshield.

Maintaining your colonies in *Fallen Haven* requires the brush of a Renaissance artist coupled with the ingenuity of a high school science project. There's not a great deal of depth in what can be built, but balancing enough power to run mining platforms, research centers, armories, and the invaluable slurpee machines (the blueberry flavor's downright brutal in a siege) can be a tightrope walk. Constructing the roads and walls in preparation for orbital invasions will feel like *Rampart*, an arcade game of bygone days.

In sharp contrast to *Destiny*, the game is a breeze to navigate. Status reports, options, and map views are logically placed, and easy to get to. A neat "overwatch" feature in the game can be toggled for each unit, letting you always keep enough action points available for that unit to fire if necessary.

Fallen Haven

Despite its addicting qualities, a couple of thorns creep up through the Lilly shoots. The game screen remains fixed at 640x480, so anyone using a higher resolution must endure a claustrophobic window for viewing the action. There's little or no variation on game play, no random maps, and no ability to play against a friend (though all these missing features are planned for *Fallen Haven 2*).

The bottom line for the success of any game rests on two distinct questions. First, will it send warm, tingly feelings shooting through your temples, and enrich your very being with a profound sense of wholesomeness? If the answer in your mind is a hazy yes, then it's only fair to inform you that it probably wasn't sugar you put in that last batch of cookies. Seek professional assistance. Fast. Secondly, is it fun? In the case of this game, the answer is a resounding yes. Borne of simplicity, yet filled with subtle complexity, this game will keep Father Time jogging forward well past curfew with nary a glance at the clock between turns.

A cursory look at *Fallen Haven* paints a deceptive picture of an average paper, rock, and pretzels game ("paper beats rock," "pretzel beats paper," "beer beats everything.") Anyone curious enough to delve deeper will be rewarded with a curiously addicting game. After all, somebody's gotta save this universe from perpetual choir practice. *–Tim Royal*

Krush, Kill, N' Destroy

Electronic Arts

DOS

★★★☆☆

At the time of this writing, the count is somewhere around thirty-two. "Thirty-two what?" you ask. Thirty-two real-time strategy games headed our way, most of them being what we refer to as *Clone & Conquer* games; that is, games trying to tap into the immensely popular genre inspired by *Command & Conquer* (and *Warcraft I & II*, though that isn't nearly as alliterative).

One of the first to hit the streets is Beam Software's *KKND* (for *Krush, Kill 'n' Destroy*), published by Electronic Arts. Let's get this out on the table right from the start: this is a pretty shameless rip-off of *C&C*. What it brings new to the table consists of small interface and gameplay enhancements—nothing radical. Not that being a clone of a smash hit is necessarily a bad thing.

But the sad thing is that it could have been much more. The fiction of the story posits a post-apocalyptic world. After the war some of humanity went underground and worked on preserving its technology, while the rest stayed on the surface and mutated. Now the Survivors (those who went underground) are ready to work on their tans, while the surface-dwelling Evolved are wary of Survivor technology (and in any case, they don't have enough sun block to go around). Thus the stage is set for war.

The problem is, Beam didn't take this far enough. In the fiction the Evolved are a quasi-religious group who shun technology, embrace the earth, and work on harnessing the power of the mutated creatures with whom they share the surface. To that end, they ride dire wolves and breed giant scorpions—which is great! But they also drive

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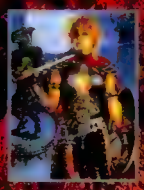
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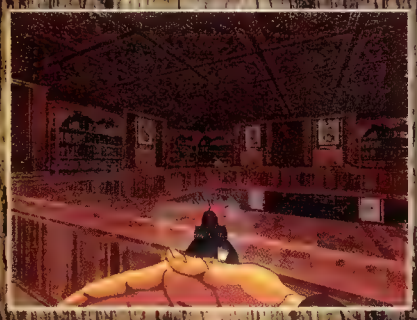

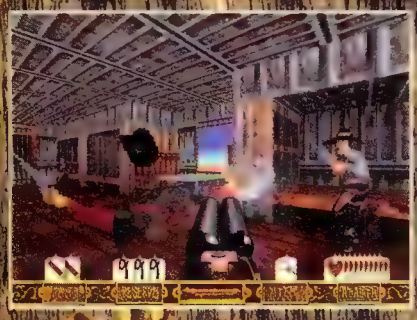

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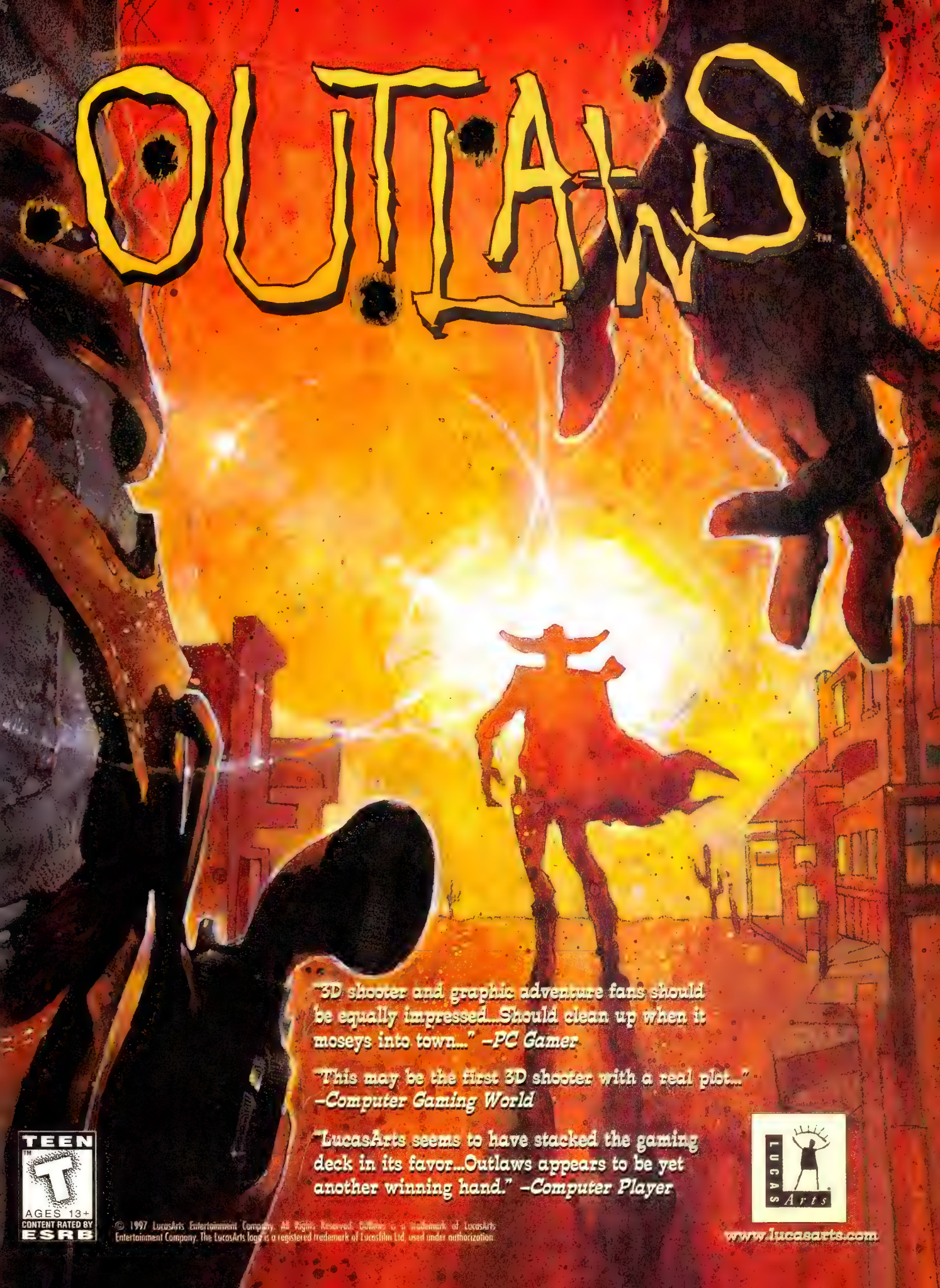
OUTLAWS
"3D shooter and graphic adventure fans should be equally impressed...Should clean up when it moseys into town..." –PC Gamer
"This may be the first 3D shooter with a real plot..." –Computer Gaming World
"LucasArts seems to have stacked the gaming deck in its favor...Outlaws appears to be yet another winning hand." –Computer Player
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monster trucks and motorcycles, and within two missions of the start of the game, they've cast aside their belief system and started drilling for oil (the *KKND* equivalent of Tiberium). Thereafter both sides feel very much the same.

Down to the nuts and bolts. *KKND* offers an excellent interface via "fly-out" menus that reside on a narrow bar at screen right. Using these, you can set up a production queue from anywhere on the map. Up to nine of each type of unit can be added to the queue, or you can just order the game to create certain units until the cash runs out. Beyond that, the interface closely mimics that of the original *C&C*. You can assign a group of units to a hot key, but there are no guard or patrol options, or any of the other *C&C: Red Alert* enhancements.

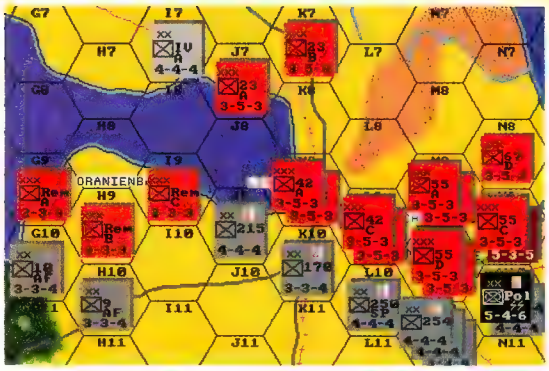
Krush, Kill, N' Destroy

Gameplay embellishments include experience for units, veteran infantry units that heal themselves over time, Tech Bunkers (a.k.a. power-ups) to be discovered, and a new way of taking over buildings (A building has x defenders inside. By sending x+1 Saboteur/Vandals into an enemy building, you'll destroy the building and have a cash bonus added to your account).

Multiplayer is via IPX or modem—no TCP/IP support. LAN mode supports six players, two per *KKND* CD. Alliances are possible (the units of allied players won't attack each other). No scenario editor is included, though the thirty single player and ten multiplayer mission ought to keep you busy for a while.

In single player mode, the AI is a mixed bag. Individual units seem to have a sense of self-preservation. Faced with overwhelming odds, enemy units will flee—which sounds trivial but isn't seen nearly often enough in real-time games. However, the strategic level AI (the opposing player, if you will) can be *incredibly* dense. Witness a game where the AI insisted on continually building a base in an area swarming with the human player's units. It started a building only to see it immediately destroyed. So it'd start building again (we're talking instantly) and have it destroyed again...this went on for the duration of the scenario. It was made even more annoying by the fact that friendly units won't attack a structure unless ordered to.

To sum it all up, *KKND* is a fine *C&C* clone that doesn't seem to take itself too seriously (both manual and in-game cut scenes are quite campy and believe it or not, pretty funny ...humor being a subjective thing). If you loved those games (and it is much closer to *C&C* than it is to *Warcraft*) then you'll get some enjoyment here. Keep in mind that number *thirty-two,* though—there'll be a lot of *Clone & Conquer*'s to choose from in the coming months. *–Peter Smith*



Leningrad 2.0

Leningrad 2.0

Schwerpunkt

DOS

★★★½☆

Schwerpunkt began its [planned] twelve game *War in the East* series well over a year ago with the release of *Leningrad*; while the first couple of games were a breath of fresh air to wargamers looking for operational-level games covering the Eastern Front during World War II, they left a lot to be desired as *computer games*; the interfaces were awkward, the scenarios few in number, and many of the mechanics reflected the hobby's boardgame origins unnecessarily. Schwerpunkt, however, listened to many gamers' complaints and has been adding features and improving gameplay diligently with each new release; with the publication of *Izyum*, the fifth game in the series, the system has matured quite a bit. Armed with those improvements–plus a few new ones–Schwerpunkt has started revamping their entire line before continuing on in the series, and *Leiningrad* is the first to get the *2.0* treatment.

New features over the original include: automatic supply, a history function (calls up a turn-by-turn rendering of the original operations), an enlarged strategic map, better fog of war, designer's notes in the documentation, modifications to the combat system, and improvements to the user interface. Features seen in the series for the first time include a scenario editor, automatic retreats, and slight changes to the map display functions.

All-in-all, the changes do nothing but improve the game. While the user interface is still quite clunky, I didn't get the feeling I was fighting it like I did in earlier games. There are still concerns about gameplay longevity; with only three scenarios, it's easy to exhaust the game. The scenario editor alleviates this, but is poorly documented and suffers from interface problems. Nevertheless, I've had more outright *fun* with *Leningrad 2.0* than I have with any other game in the series (and with some "big name" wargames as well); so, despite its flaws, I'd recommend it to any wargamer. *–Scott Udell*

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Star Command: Revolution

GT Interactive

DOS

★★½☆☆

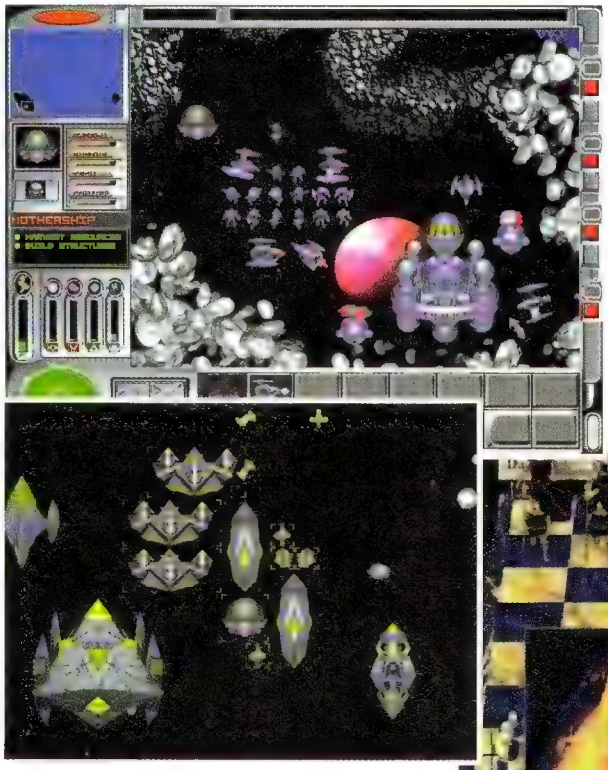
In this year of the "Clone & Conquer" games, many are looking desperately for a real-time strategy game that tries to do something differently, that attempts to be original. *Star Command* makes some attempts, and has some good design ideas, but in the end fails because of a major flaw. The game universe is not outstandingly original: four races discover a new form of powerful energy and suddenly fall to warring amongst themselves, a mysterious Overlord comes in to scarf up the pieces, and you lead the unified underdog Star Command, whose goal is to regain control of the four peoples, stop their warfare, and unite against the Overlord. You start by high-jacking one of his motherships, and fight from there.

While set in space, the gameplay feels more like combat in a cave system (you're hemmed in by many asteroid clusters, which form chambers and tunnels in space). Your ships maneuver on the now familiar two-dimensional plane; in fact, if you shut out the stars in the background, the cartoonish visuals feel a lot like those in *Warcraft II* (a feeling enhanced by the voices, many of which could almost have been lifted from *Warraft*–was that "by your command" from a knight or a Nomad ship?). You start out with a simple human base, some human ships, and the stolen mothership. The mothership is key in this game: it collects resources, conducts research, and builds new buildings (but not ships); lose the mothership and the game is over.

Research is automatic, and somewhat random; a mothership must be next to a university structure to conduct it, which requires something of a choice on your part: do I research at my base, collect resources, or lead my fleet into new areas (and perhaps build a new university on the frontier)? Once all of your race's ships and structures are researched you move on to the next race, and the next.

The campaign structure starts out seeming quite unique but ends up damaging the game terribly. Instead of the linear missions all-too typical in this kind of game, each mission represents a sector on a larger map. You move between missions using portals, but the catch is that only your mothership can make the transit, not the fleets you've built, nor any of your structures. Because of this, you must often build up new bases and fleets on the resources you collect or bring with you. The fatal flaw is that you must be very careful about resource utilization; you can use too much of something in one mission, only to discover your error hours and many sectors later. Without that certain bit you can't complete the game, and because the game only allows one save (and it's automatic; it only happens when you go through a portal), you may have to start completely over again, hoping against hope that you don't make a similar mistake elsewhere in the campaign. While this try-fail-restart cycle is familiar and acceptable to action gamers, it has no place in a strategy game. Individually, the missions can be fun; while the combat tends to become a dogfight with no strategizing, building up your forces and moving in *is* entertaining… at least until you discover that you have to restart the game because you just don't have enough solinite to build a lousy base and a handful of defensive ships.

Hopefully GT Interactive and developer Metropolis will take another look at the issue of resources (or at least allow multiple–and in-mission–saves), because *Star Command* could have been a fun little game. Until then, though, only very persistent and patient gamers should consider joining the revolution against the Overlord. *–Scott Udell*



Star Command: Revolution

Chess Wars

Art Data Interactive

DOS

★★½☆☆

It's been quite a while since there's been a worthy successor to *Battle Chess*, which helped a new generation of youth discover the beauty of chess. *Chess Wars* from Art Data is an ambitious attempt, using live-action video with a medieval flare, to spice up this timeless game. Unfortunately, a few bugs and missing niceties keep it from truly succeeding.

The label proclaims *Chess Wars* proudly as an MS-DOS product, and the manual recommends rebooting from Windows 95 into DOS. The game though will run adequately with a DOS drop straight from the desktop. There are occasional crashes when switching from the FMV sequences, but these occur under both systems.

The program begins with a lengthy intro about a peaceful kingdom being threatened by invading marauders. Enough costume changes and scenery exist to portray two factions at war convincingly. I did develop a liking for a certain one-eyed crazed bishop. The cinematic battle scenes are varied enough to keep me from toggling them off. Parents may want to preview the game, as several of the death scenes are sufficiently bloody to warrant concern.

Chess Wars

As a chess program, the game is adequate, but just barely. There are hint functions and positional evaluations. There is a large library of openings and a large selection of past masters' games. There is, however, no analysis of these moves. The game lacks PGN compatibility. In addition, certain features listed on the box, such as being able to compete against the styles of past masters, did not make it into the initial release (though they are promised in a future update).

Although the video sequences are entertaining, it's hard to recommend *Chess Wars,* especially when Sierra's excellent *Power Chess* is also available and has enough flash to attract younger players. *–Chuck Klimushyn*

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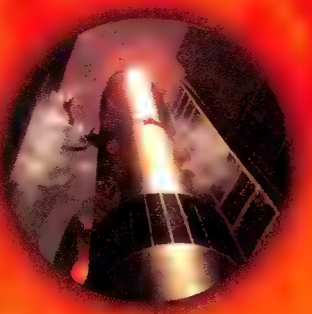

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Cheat Thrills

Cheaters always prosper–and then complain

A Wonderbra model shows you the way through Tomb Raider

We get so many letters every month from people asking for more and more cheat codes that I've decided to step aside for an issue, crawl into a hole, and list a whole mess of them. If this is what you really want, you got it.

But it's so depressing. No one wants to play games anymore. They just want to cheat through the thing so they can say they finished it. But don't come bitching to me if you find that you're not enjoying your games anymore. Don't complain that a game's too easy. People could try GameWizard's "Interactive Strategy Guides" for games like *Tomb Raider*, but even though they have video of how to win the game, we don't have an OS (yet) that would allow you to watch the video while playing the game. Perhaps video tape, instead of CD-ROM, would be a better delivery method.

Then again, there are some purists out there, like Bill Vogt, who wrote in complaining about the number of people asking for more cheats:

"This letter is written in defense of the non-cheaters in the Computer Gaming Universe, and I know you're out there, that no matter what, will play the game as is, with no cheats. It impresses the hell outta people when you say you beat Quake on hard with no codes. I've even "tried" nightmare, I was told I was nuts, maybe I was, but my self preservation factor without cheating is much higher than theirs."

Yes Bill, there are still a few people out there who actually want to play their games, not experience them. Some are less concerned with how it looks on their 3Dfx card than how it plays. But they're shrinking in number. Oh well. We'll all get what we deserve, that is awesome looking crap games with oodles of cheat codes to increase the online traffic. Make 'em particularly obnoxious, and even more people will talk about them. Yippee. *–Steve Bauman*

Clockwise from top left: Tomb Raider; Blood; Redneck Rampage; XS

CHEATER

Blood

In the shareware edition, type GT, and when prompted, type:

IDAHO	All weapons & ammo
MONTANA	Above, plus items
GRISWOLD	Full armor
SATCHEL	All items
ONERING	Invisible
MARIO	Warp to another level
MCGEE	Catch fire
KRUEGER	You're flame resistant
COUSTEAU	200 health
VOORHEES	God mode
FORK BROUSSARD	Lose everything
LARA CROFT	Full ammo
RATE	Shows frame rate
GOONIES	Full map
SPIELBERG	Warp

Type T then:

MAP	Map
AMMO	All ammo
GOD	God mode
GUNS	All guns
KEYS	All keys
CLIP	Walk through walls

Tomb Raider

To skip a level, do this:
Walk one step forward (using the <SHIFT> key), one back, turn around three full times, and then jump forward.

To get all of the weapons:
Walk one step forward (using the <SHIFT> key), one back, turn around three full times, and then jump backward.

Redneck Rampage

Precede each of these cheats with RD, i.e. RDALL

ALL	Get everything
CLIP	Go through walls
ELVIS	God mode
GUNS	All weapons
INVENTORY	All inventory
KEYS	All keys
RATE	Show frame rate
UNLOCK	Unlock doors

XS

Enter your name as PENSION or MEDICAL and you can access two secret levels.

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WINDOWS 95 CD-ROM

GT® GT Interactive Software

Feeling the funk

Interstate '76

Activision

Windows 95

★★★☆☆

Return to an era of gas lines and "Saturday Night Fever, " of polyester jump suits and blow-dried hair, of bangs and Bradys, of progressive rock, punk and funk. Yes, it's the '70s, a time that's so popular the people who experienced it won't admit it and younger generations act with great reverence toward it, despite the obvious fact that it was lame. Ah, to own a pair of rust-colored bell-bottom Sears "Toughskins" and a "Have a Nice Day" t-shirt.

That lameness is what makes *Interstate '76*, a 3D combat/driving game, so fascinating. Its shtick is the 70's, and Activision was probably right to think that many gamers are children of that wasted decade. With its brilliant low-polygon-count cut scenes and superb music score, it has the look and feel down. Unfortunately, as is often the case, a brilliant concept and presentation do not a great game make.

The game is divided into three distinct sections. There's "The Trip," a campaign of missions, complete with animated interludes and a story; "Melee Scenarios," where you can drive any vehicle in the entire game, arm it with whatever weapons and options, and "solve" a mission; and "Instant Melee," a single-player battle where you enter an area with a car and weapons and battle against one or more opponents. Full multiplayer play in the "Melee" mode is supported, over modem, LAN, null-modem or the Internet. Internet play is even more simple than that found in *Quake*, and it works marvelously. In fact, the superb multiplayer is the only thing that keeps the game from receiving a lower score.

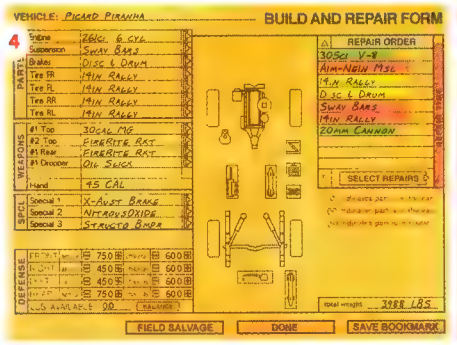
"The Trip" is where all of the game's strengths and flaws rise to the surface. The missions are canned, with no random elements (aside from different model cars for the bad guys). The vehicles will always be in the same place, and will attack at exactly the same time. After completing a mission, certain "special" items will always be salvaged just in time for the next mission (for example, the nitrous makes an appearance just in time for a mission with a big jump).

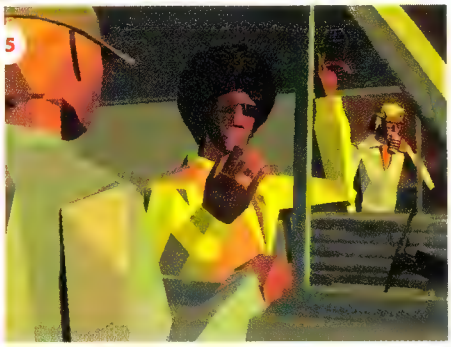
While as a game the design is disappointing, the story and cut scenes are brilliant, in a kitschy *Starsky & Hutch* kind of way. Each mission is presented like a bad, hour-long TV show, where inevitably it'll end in a car chase. There's plenty of corny dialogue, polygonal afros, and lots of polyester. Not since LucasArts' *Full Throttle* has a game maintained such a singularly unique style. The masterstroke is the use of the same polygonal models the 3D engine uses for cut scenes. Other games throw fancy rendered scenes in the middle of their polygon-fests, but *Interstate '76* never pulls you out of the gameworld. Whether or not you love this sort of thing, from the polygons to the bellbottoms, it will likely have a great influence on your opinion of the game.

Therein lies the big problem when evaluating *Interstate 76*. It's so strong in concept that, assuming you don't run away from it in horror, you may find yourself blind to its obvious problems, and there are a few doozies. Start with ugly visuals, a poor frame rate on just about any machine, and move on to big things like bad AI and obvious gameplay logic flaws.

The visuals aren't particularly great, and the 3D engine, brought over from *MechWarrior 2*, breaks up a lot, with objects disappearing and re-appearing; more ominously, vehicles will "become one" with walls and buildings. On a 133MHz Pentium, the game can barely handle an ugly low-resolution mode with full detail, and a 200MHz MMX Pentium can't handle 640x480. No 3D card support is included; the game could certainly use it.

However, the 3D's a minor problem compared to the poor AI. Every battle eventually becomes a turning contest, with the computer cars always dropping oil to cover





[1] Most battles end up a turning contest; [2] The TV-show intro is hysterical; [3] The frame rate is poor and the terrain bland, but the cars look fabulous; [4] In between missions, you'll salvage parts and repair existing ones; [5] Taurus talks to Skeeter and Groove. The cut scenes go along way to making the "Trip" more immersive

their tracks. They do stupid things, like running repeatedly into mountains if they're in the direct path to your car (assuming they're not already stuck driving up the side of it). If you drive on some bridges in the environments, the AI cars won't, or can't, follow you (they just circle below). All of the missions are trigger-driven, so if you figure out an alternative way to beat something, you're out of luck, because you haven't completed the mission the way the game thinks you should.

The final evaluation of *Interstate '76* would have to say that it's disappointing as a single-player game. Once again, multiplayer saves the day, but it's still a shame that it's not better, because the premise is brilliant. As usual, a bit more fine-tuning would have made a difference. Great concept, mediocre execution. *–Steve Bauman*

Pod

UbiSoft

Windows 95

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

★★★★½

Seldom does a game live up to the hype preceding its release, but Pod is one of the few that fits the bill. For PC gamers awaiting an arcade racer that truly does a PC's capabilities justice, the game is like a dream come true. Playable on both MMX and non-MMX machines with acceleration support for the 3Dfx, ATi Rage, and S3 Virge chipsets (though not, for some reason, Rendition or straight Direct 3D), *Pod* is the only current MMX game that will support MMX and 3D hardware acceleration simultaneously.

The MMX version is noticeably superior to its non-MMX counterpart in every way; it looks and sounds better, appears to have better AI, and even seems to control more smoothly. While the game normally looks great, the MMX/3Dfx combo produces one of the slickest, most visually arresting games ever created. Even coin-op games don't look as good (with or without MMX, *Pod* is a stunning showcase for the 3DFx card). The game contains 16 tracks and eight tweakable cars, with the promise of additional tracks and cars being made available for download from UbiSoft's website (www.ubisoft.com). Most of the tracks are wild, varying and at times confusing, and the computer cars are aggressive and competitive, if not particularly smart (they try to block you in oftentimes, and sudden swerving can really confuse them). The cars have exceptional control and different handling characteristics. The game does lack the hardcore powersliding of Sega's *Daytona* and *Rally* titles, which may or may not be a good thing, depending upon your view of those games.

A large part of the MMX enhancements are brought to bear in the game's impressive sound (complete with Dolby Surround options). The soundtrack is almost an unnoticeable background hum during racing, but the car effects are superb. The car physics are excellent as well, especially when watching the opponent cars react around you–suspensions bump, and cars flip, crash and bounce as they land after a hard jump. There are also none of those annoying time limits; in *Pod* you only have to race against the other cars (and the treacherous tracks), not the clock.

The multiplayer aspects of the game are just as impressive, with high latency Internet, LAN, split screen, and modem support. You can mix and match for up to eight players. For example, two players on the same machine (via split screen) can compete against players over the Internet and an IPX network all at once. The game generally works quite well over the Internet.

Pod

EXTREME (*ik-ˈstrēm*) *adj*: exceeding the ordinary, average or expected.

ASSAULT (*ə-ˈsȯlt*) *n*: a violent physical attack.

Some problems were encountered getting the game to notice controllers, especially on the non-MMX machine for some reason. Also, it must be noted that diehard fans of driving sims like *NASCAR Racing 2* and *IndyCar Racing* are probably going to find *Pod* too arcade-like. To get tolerable frame rates on a non-MMX machine, 3D acceleration is highly recommended, though the game is playable on a 133 and has a variety of graphic settings to let you get the best performance. Frame rates on MMX machines are supposedly 32 fps without acceleration and as high as 70-80 with a 3DFx card (and it shows). The game is not recommended at all for Pentiums under 120 MHz.

If you've been looking for something to really show off that new MMX machine, then look no further. *Pod* is virtually everything a PC racer should be, and it's probably the first PC-only game that not only deserves to be in the arcade, but is better than almost anything you'll find there. In one fell swoop, the PC has not only managed to surpass the consoles, but even the arcades. – *Jason D'Aprile*

Pod ▲

Scourge of Armagon

Activision

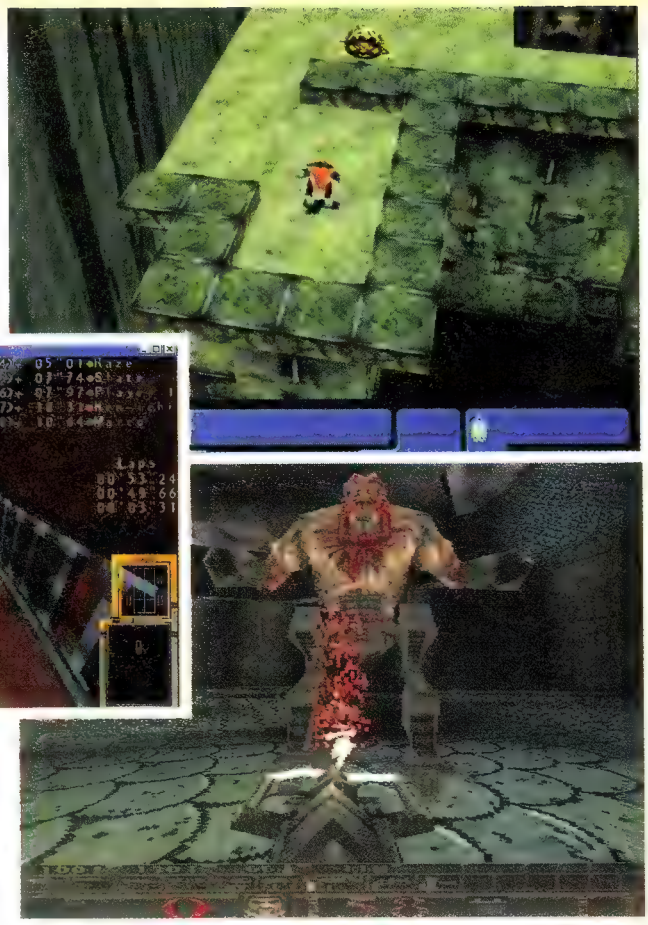
DOS

★★★½☆

As the first officially sanctioned add-on for Quake, Hipnotic's *Scourge of Armagon* has a lot to live up to, especially when you consider that the designers created many of the levels for *Duke Nukem 3D*. Freed from the limits of that game's engine, they've imbued *Scourge* with oodles of 3D effects–possibly too many. There are noticeable drop-offs in frame rate in some of the more complex environments. However, special mention must be made of the sheer variety of doors present. They open every which way but normal, which will keep amateur level builders scratching their heads and saying, "How'd they do that?" However, groovy doors do not a good level make, so it's up to the actual layout and design to carry the day, and it does. For the most part surpass those found in *Quake*, though for argument's sake, one could say that had id had waited until now to finish *Quake*, its levels would have been better as well.

Scourge of Armagon gives you a few new things to kill and kill with. The two new beasts are the gremlin, who in addition to eating dead guys likes to steal your weapons, and the centroid, an armored scorpion. One question the game doesn't answer is how a giant scorpion, itself a genetic marvel, evolved to such a point that it has nail guns in place of the more traditional pincers. The three new weapons are the laser cannon, Mjolnir (the hammer that id originally promised for *Quake*) and the proximity mine. One new power-up, the empathy shield, is especially good for multiplayer games because it causes the attacker and the player to split the damage. Other new power-ups include the "Horn of Conjuring" (it summons a random creature to help you out) and a wetsuit.

A lame end-boss (apparently mailed in from *Doom*–get real close to it and you'll easily defeat it) keeps *Scourge* from ending on a positive note. Outside of that, the only real criticism is one leveled at *Quake* itself. After the lush, organic environments of *Tomb Raider*, it's a bit depressing to find yourself in the rather austere and monochrome world of *Quake*. *Scourge of Armagon* adds a lot more visual interest, but the perception you can get from the game is that much of it is still spent in those endless monochrome tunnels. Obviously those who've played the game obsessively since day one won't care a bit, but casual players looking for something radically different would probably be best served looking elsewhere. –*Steve Bauman*



The Divide: Enemies Within ▶

Scourge of Armagon ▲

The Divide: Enemies Within

Viacom New Media

Windows 95

★★★½☆

Those of you who have been playing consoles over the years will probably remember the Metroid series, which happens to be some of the finest side-scrolling sci-fi gaming action available. Nintendo 64 owners are undoubtedly waiting for Metroid 64 with bated breath, though it's not scheduled for some time yet. In the meantime, Viacom has released what is essentially a *Metroid 3D* clone in the form of *The Divide: Enemies Within*. And sure enough, the game is excellent, very console-ish stuff.

The Divide starts out simply enough; frozen on an alien world while trying to conquer it, you awaken to find that the predatory indigenous lifeforms have incorporated your technology into their evolution, thus making them armed and hostile. There's also something about rescuing your mate who was kidnapped upon planetfall as well, but the game comes down to platform jumping, shooting everything in sight, collecting power-ups and navigating your way through a vast, confusing alien landscape. The game supports both MMX and 3D acceleration (though not simultaneously) and looks excel-

The Divide: Enemies Within

lent, even without acceleration. There are some great atmospheric effects like rain and lightning, and the levels are challenging and entertaining. The audio effects are quite good also, and accompany the action well.

Both a PlayStation and PC release, *The Divide*'s shortcomings all root themselves squarely in the game's console roots. First off, you can only save in specific rooms instead of at will, which is a pointless restraint in a PC game. The biggest failing in the game, however, is the fact that monsters respawn as soon as you leave an area, and since backtracking is a major part of the game, it's annoying to have to kill the same monster twelve times in a row. Other than that, control is definitely preferable with a control pad, but seemed off occasionally (and the camera viewing angles aren't nearly as configurable as they should be). In the end, this is still a very solid 3D revamp of a classic game and should provide almost any action gamer with hours of challenging, atmospheric sci-fi shooting fun. *–Jason D'Aprile*

XS

GT Interactive

DOS

★★☆☆☆

XS is one of those games that gets some points in its favor for good concept. Instead of the standard Doom-style game where you plow through a horde of mindless killer monsters who pretty much stay put within their own special sectors on a level, why not have a small number of "smart" opponents who will hunt you (and each other) out? *XS* tries to answer the question, but only mildly succeeds. You take the role of a cyborg mercenary who enters a death tournament in order to take a stab at the prize pot and a chance to kill all your rivals. Four mercs enter an arena, one comes out. Nice, neat and simple.

XS

The game's default use of the mouse to aim works well, and the variety of opponents, arenas and weapons is impressive. The enemy AI evades attacks by jumping, strafing, ducking for cover and even running away. Computer opponents will attack each other, but most of the time they don't act particularly smart. There's enough here for at least some light challenge, and the large number of opponents and arenas help give the game a boost in playability. If only it were better looking. The low-res graphics bring up fond remembrances of *Doom*, and how good it looked compared to this. The opponents are polygonal, but you wouldn't know it until you are right on top of them. There is a four player network mode as well, which is actually what the AI of the game's one player game is supposed to simulate.

XS is really just one of those games you pick up and play for a level when you need to kill some time, since there isn't that much to do in it and the graphics engine is extremely out of date. It certainly doesn't offer anything in the way of compelling atmosphere or gameplay. It's not terrible, just terribly shallow and out-classed, given the current state of first-person shooters. *–Jason D'Aprile*

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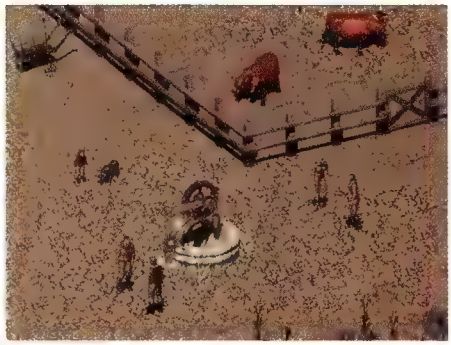
Road to Nowhere

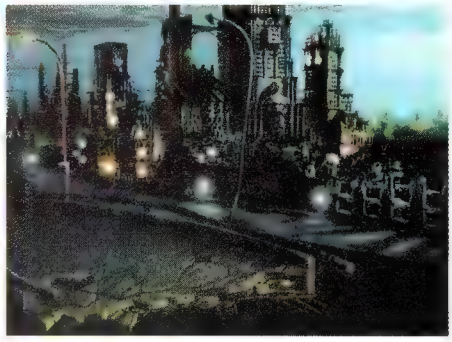
Fallout: To GURPS or not to GURPS

Taking its place next to "making the sequel to a blockbuster" is "licensing the hot trademark" in game producers' attempts to lasso the already-sold audience. With the licenses, however, come the *licensors*, which can range from the sterile licensing department of, say, a Paramount, to singly protective creative personages – virtual stage-mothers-in-disguise when it comes to the handling of their properties. TSR has recently been extremely liberal (although protective) with its *D&D* licensing. I saw one in a bubble gum machine the other day, but when I put in my quarter, I got the AOL disk instead.

Writers like Terry Brooks, Terry Pratchett, Gentry Lee, Harlan Ellison, Spider Robinson and Tom Clancy, to name a few, have all undergone the process of dropping their "children" into the gaping maws, er…the *nurturing laps* of computer game development teams. This is the story of *GURPS*, the *Generic Universal Role Playing System*, and its daddy, Steve Jackson of Steve Jackson Games… and its former guardian, Interplay.

Three years or so ago, Interplay's president Brian Fargo was in the market for an RPG license and TSR had not yet started putting its *D&D* ones in CrackerJack boxes. A group of *GURPS*-addicted developers, including designer/programmer Tim Cain, convinced Fargo that *GURPS* would be a hot property indeed on which to build an RPG. Tim's group had already formulated the concept for a post-nuclear world, and felt that *GURPS* would provide the perfect game system to house their ideas, primarily because it is just that – a game *system* – world not included. So a contract was signed between Jackson and Interplay, the contents of which no one realized would eventually bite everybody's collective butt. So what happened to *Fallout: A GURPS Post Nuclear Adventure*? It's been de-*GURPS*-ed.





Clockwise from top left: Steve Jackson still awaits word from Interplay's legal department; Think twice before befriending mutant cattle; Fallout's dark, foreboding skyline bespeaks Gotham; That touch o' Picard…

Interplay's Take

"We knew that he [Jackson] didn't want to have too much violence and drug use and stuff," said Tim Cain, producer and lead programmer of *Fallout*. "About two years ago, Steve Jackson Games had no trouble with the violence, dismemberment, and other gruesome death things in the game, so they [the development team] went ahead with it."

After the alpha release, however, it seems that Jackson had more than a few problems with the title. "He didn't like the little stick figure guy…he said, 'I'm sorry, these are just low-quality images"…he didn't like the intro movie's music or its shooting sequence. [About the opening shooting sequence]: We are just trying to show that this was a world that got really *bad* before it got even worse, y'know?" I knew. I *love* the intro movie.

Cain took all of Jackson's directly GURPS-related suggestions immediately to heart since, "Steve Jackson is, of course, the last word about GURPS…but when he started making comments about 'change this and change that,' I mean, I value the guy's opinion but tried to tell him that his was only *one* of the valued opinions with respect to the overall makeup of the game."

The full-approval vs. limited approval issue is the crux of the disagreement between the two factions, and it seems to boil down to the interpretation of a contractual phrase having something to do with Steve Jackson having approval on the "quality of the environment of the mark." Interplay believes that this phrase issues approval rights about *GURPS* system-specific items only. Jackson disagrees.

Miscommunication has been rampant, in person as well as in on-line messaging (some of which got pretty testy). "I guess maybe I didn't wear the producer hat well enough," says Cain. "We did not buy the *world* from Steve Jackson, nor did we necessarily want his input into the world – that 's why we wanted *GURPS* to begin with…because it was *not* a world."

Some *GURPS* fans who have been accusing Interplay of Foulplay make the point that it would be *impossible* for Interplay to have worked on a title for nearly three years and then all of a sudden pop in a new game engine. They believe that the engine change and undermining of *GURPS* must have been in the works for a long time. Cain, who is also the lead programmer on the project makes an even stronger case. The *GURPS* system is implemented as just a couple of function calls in the entire scheme of things. The combat module simply evaluates parameters according to the *GURPS* rules and sends results back. The character editor is also as standalone as the combat engine. Substitute these two functions (and provide the main engine with some distance information) and voila, you have De-*GURPS*-ation – a simple plug 'n' play operation.

It seems that *no one*, least of all Tim Cain and his group, is happy with the outcome of this situation…"Sometimes I feel like I'm caught right in the middle between Interplay and Steve Jackson Games, when all I *really* wanted to do was to make a very cool sequel to *Wasteland* with a really cool RPG engine." Well, Tim, take heart. I think that's what we'll see. *–Cindy Yans*

Steve Jackson had plenty to say about this issue. Stay tuned for Steve's equal time in a future Road to Nowhere.

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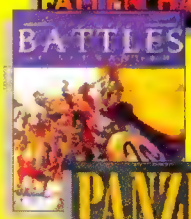

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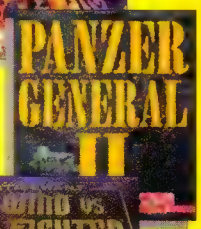

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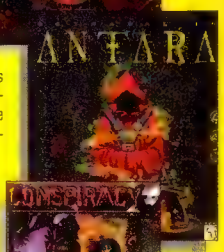

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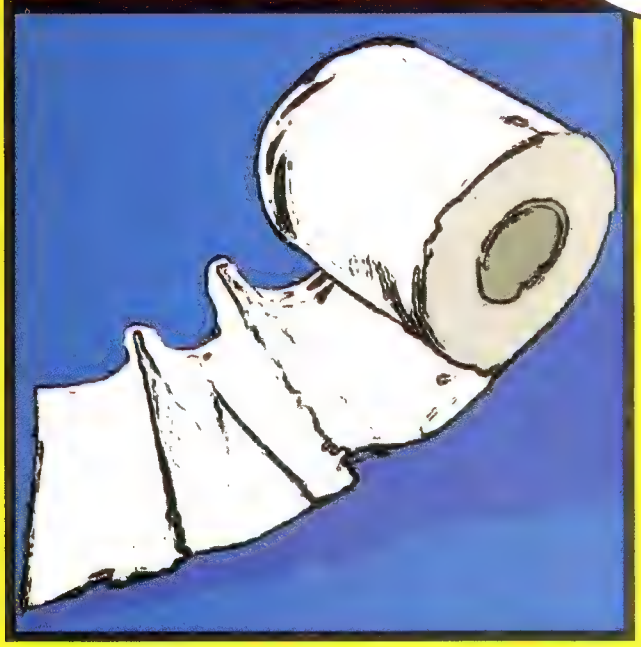

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Boots of Re

Unca pursues pi (in the Circle of Blood)

The Big Sleepy (the dragon who looks like Bogart)

When I first flew into Slim's cave in Krakow, I met her little sister. If you can ever call a dragon little, that is. Sis was nothing like Slim, though. Slim may have been a sadder but wiser kind of gal, but Sis was just a tramp. A little girl, lost – wandering the mean streets – waiting for some shining knight to rescue her. "Not me," I said, "Go away little girl."

And she went. *Far* away.

Hot & Not

Diablo was again the most popular role-playing game of the month. *Obsidian* is definitely worth a look, especially for *Myst* lovers.

Circle of Blood: Acts Two through Five

In Act Two, talk to Maguire outside of Mac Devitt's Lounge, then go inside to talk to the sneezer and grab his snare during a sneeze. Talk to the man with glasses (Fitzgerald), go to the bar to talk to Doyle and offer to buy him a beer. While he's drinking, take the towel from under his elbow.

Talk to both Fitzgerald and Maguire again. Talk to Fitzgerald until he leaves. After Maguire makes his announcement go out to talk to him. Turn off the beer pump switch beside the door and then ask the bartender for a beer. Show him Khan's ID card to get a job as an electrician and use the snare on the glass-washer's plug. Flip the lever in the dark cellar, go to the street to open the grate, then pick up the gem in the cellar.

Go to the castle gate and talk to the farmer guarding the haystack. Climb the stack, insert the manhole tool and climb over the wall. Go to the ladder and after the goat knocks you down use the plowshare to trap him. Climb down the ladder and get some plaster. Knock over the small idol sitting in the sand and then pick it back up. Use the plaster on the holes in the sand. Go back to the cellar, turn on the water tap, and wet the towel. Wring the wet towel over the plaster in the sand and use the cast on the holes in the wall to enter a secret room.

In Act Three show Nicole the gem and go to the Police Station to ask Moue about Marquet. Go to the Hospital and show the receptionist your ID. Talk about Nurse Grendel to get directions. Go down the corridor and unplug the floor polisher to get a white coat from the closet. Talk to the Doctor with the mustache back at the reception desk. Go down the left corridor. Give Benoir the pressure cuff and tell him to use it on Eric Sopmash. Talk to Marquet in his room. Go to the museum and talk to Lobineau. When the guard is not looking, open the window, and hide in the sarcophagus. When the raid starts, push the totem pole.

In Act Four go to the Montfaucon Catacombs in Paris and juggle for the juggler. Show the gendarme your red nose then juggle again. After the gendarme leaves open the manhole and climb down. Examine the arch across the bridge and to the right. Punch out a hole with the manhole tool. Examine the hole to pull a lever and then to find a cog to attach the boat's chain hook. Turn the winch to open the door. Enter the room and use the upper spy hole to watch the Templars' meeting. After they've rowed off, go down the steps and place the tripod in the circle. Place the gem on the tripod.

In Act Five go to Spain and use the pressure cuff on the hose. Enter the house and walk to the door past the suit of armor. When the dogs bark, hide behind the armor until the servant leaves. Go upstairs and talk to the Countess about chess. In the mausoleum pick up the Bible and examine the lectern. Talk to the Countess about chess and she'll send her man to fetch pieces. Solve the puzzle by placing the Bishop on the top square, the Knight on the middle and the King on the square below the Knight, checkmating the King.

Kwaheri (goodbye in Swahili) *–Andy Backer*

[1] Use the manhole tool to climb over the wall

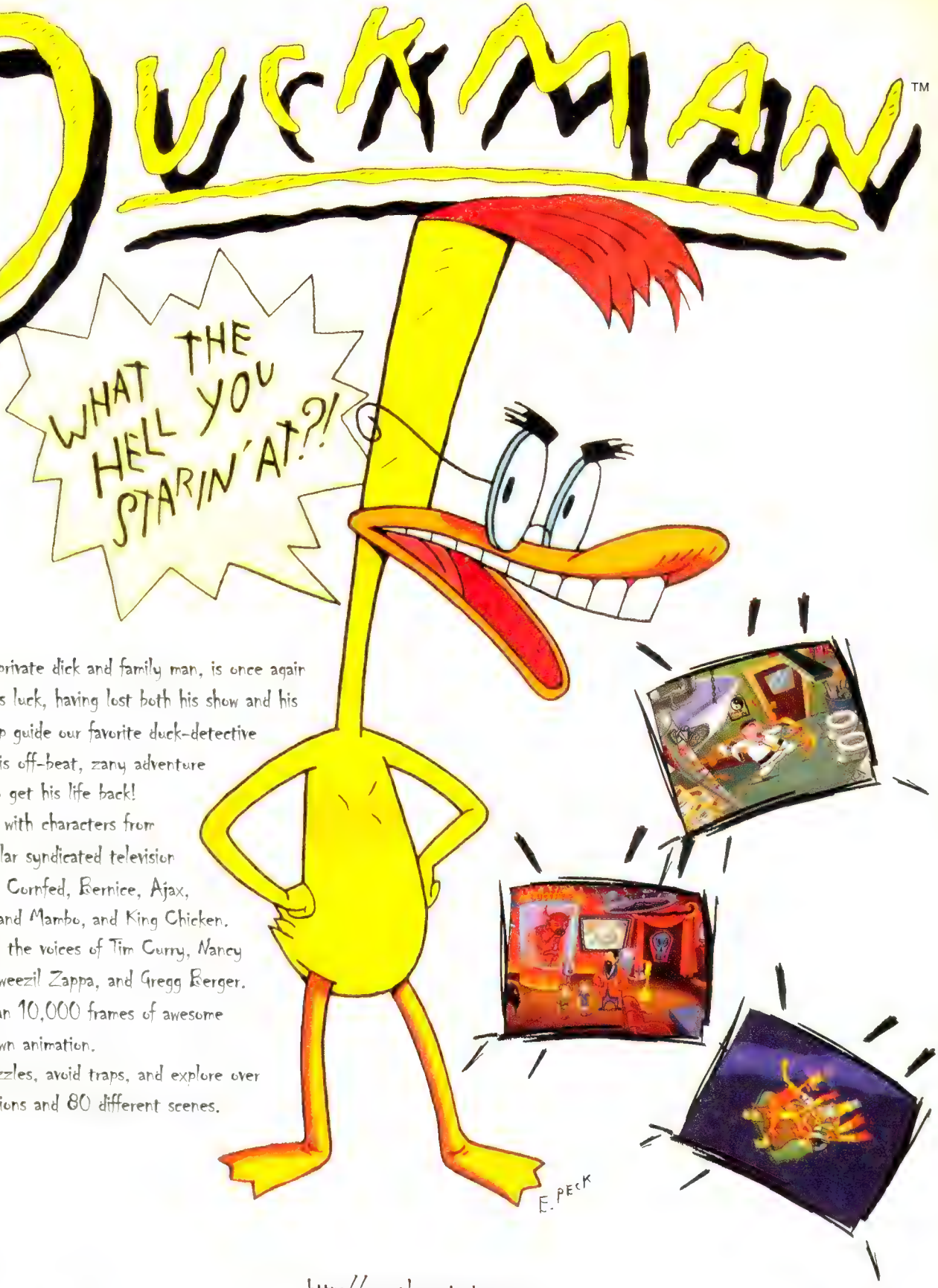
[2] Use the upper hole to spy on a meeting

[3] You see the mysterious Templars

[4] The Knight goes above the King

[5] Solve the chess puzzle and get the Chalice

DUCKMAN™



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PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT PIE

A first-class ticket to adventure

The Last Express

DOS, Windows 95, Macintosh

Broderbund

★★★★½

All aboard! This innovative adventure game is now leaving the station. It's a first class ticket, all the way. Jordan Mechner, the designer of this ode to *Casablanca* on rails, has created a multimedia masterpiece. Mr. Mechner previously designed the award-winning series *Prince of Persia* but has far surpassed it with this suspense thriller filled with mystery, romance and international intrigue.

It all takes place on The Orient Express during that legendary train's last trip from Paris to Constantinople, just before the outbreak of WWI. It also begins with the hero discovering a murder, but otherwise bears little resemblance to the Agatha Christie novel, and its hero is not Inspector Poirot. He's Robert Cath, an American, who (like Bogart in *Casablanca*) hides his battered American idealism beneath a hard-shelled layer of cynicism. A doctor, he was barred from his practice in America because of an interest in ancient and esoteric forms of medicine. He had been living peacefully in Paris until a long-lost manuscript led him to Ireland, where he got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. He is now a fugitive wanted by the police. A telegram from an old friend Tyler Whitney offers him a safe journey to Constantinople, but just after boarding the Express he finds that his friend has been murdered.

The player takes control of Cath just after he boards. It is possible to wander aimlessly about the train's seven cars listening in to various conversations, but unless Cath soon finds and hides Whitney's body and assumes his identity, he will be arrested and have to replay the first day. The suspense is almost unbearable while the body is in danger of being discovered, especially by the conductor who makes up the beds.

One of the game's many innovations is that the player is not allowed to save and load various games. Instead, the game runs like film on a projector and is saved automatically when the player pauses or quits the game. A red line on the map keeps track of the player's progress as the train chugs towards Constantinople. The film can be rewound to various stops, thus allowing the player to try different strategies. It is automatically rewound to the point just before Cath dies in the arcade sequences (there are several times he has to fight armed adversaries without a weapon of his own).

[1] The Firebird is to Robert Cath what the Maltese Falcon was to Bogart

[2] The eunuch, Mahmud, dies guarding a harem

[3] Murder on the Orient Express

[4] No, that's not Tatiana's blood, but she is in shock

[5] Not only are there thrills and spills but old-fashioned romance, too

The player's main objective is to uncover all the strands of the elaborate plot with which Whitney was involved. Within that labyrinth hides Whitney's killer. The train is a microcosm of Europe's aristocrats, anarchists, revolutionaries, industrialists, and spies in 1914. A lost, jewel-encrusted, golden Firebird is central to the plot and a metaphor for the story.

The train is so lovingly simulated it becomes a major character in itself. One doesn't always have to explore its every nook and cranny, searching compartments, climbing out of windows, or jumping through skylights to enjoy it, either. Besides using wits and fists during the journey, it's also fun to occasionally sit quietly and just eavesdrop. This is where the game is at its best and most rewarding.

The rotoscoped, live-action partial-animation and Art Nouveau environments are very effective stylistically (the scenes could have been painted by Toulouse-Lautrec), but may be a problem for those expecting a fully animated game. You get used to it, but at times the characters move in fits and starts. There is no lip-synching. Other than that, it is difficult to find anything to complain about; every detail has been lovingly and painstakingly attended to. Perhaps there may be a bit too much arcade action for some (there is a particularly elusive beetle in the game) but it's all either optional or requires little reflex skill.

What is most refreshing are the game's puzzles. They are mostly story driven. Hiding the body, disarming a bomb and stopping a runaway train are three of the puzzles. There are a few items to find and manipulate but one can count them on one hand. *The Last Express* is a new and better way of telling an interactive story and as such provides a role model for the gaming industry. It is highly original and richly deserves all the awards it will surely get. *–Andy Backer*

The Space Bar

SegaSoft

Windows 95

★★★★☆

Excuse me while I crawl out from under my maps, notes, charts and diagrams. There. Phew. Where's the Tylenol? OK. Ready. Here we see another contrivance from Steve Meretzky, already an institution in the history of adventure gaming. Striding from *Planetfall* and *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* during gaming's equivalent to the Woodstock era, through a stint with Legend's marginally graphic *Spellcasting* trilogy, then stomping upon the scene with *Hodj 'n' Podj* from his own Boffo Games (with Mike Dornbrook and Leo DaCosta), Meretzky has stepped into a bigger-budgeted puddle called *The Space Bar,* and come up smelling like a Vedj (one of his plant characters from the game).

Several years in the making and several more in brain-utero, this title comes to SegaSoft via Rocket Science Games. At the heels of its Rocket Sci siblings, *Rocket Jockey* and *Obsidian*, the game should carve its own solid niche on retail shelves, as it is probably the most diverse graphic puzzle adventure ever to flummox the astute gamer.

You are Alias Node, intergalactic trooper, in hot pursuit of some serious space sleaze. This leads you to The Thirsty Tentacle, a real swan dive among the countless other clubs and discos in this corner of Armpit 6 (the *friendly* Armpit). You're equipped with a PDA, and a few other techno-goodies, but perhaps your most important investigative tool is Empathy Telepathy, a skill that allows you to see life through the eyes of the suspect – perhaps the most sensational ability a voyeur such as yourself can possess.

The Space Bar

Gameplay consists of entering the minds of various aliens in the bar and solving a mini-quest in each of their worlds. However, "mini-quest" is an understatement in most cases. Meretzky has constructed the most devious set of puzzles you're likely to encounter anywhere (with few exceptions). The habitat of each creature is markedly different from one to the next, and his or her biological form often comes into play (quite literally). For instance, when you become Seedrot, a member of the Vedj race, you are a plant rooted in one place and must solve the entire world from that location (this scenario becomes quite risqué as a roving photographer urges you to "Stroke your buds."); as Fleebix, the Neblitz, a disembodied brain in a mayonnaise jar (bring out the Best), you are entirely dependent on your symbiotic other, Thug, a Salivraster – all muscle and as dumb as a Pauly Shore film; as Soldier 714-Z-367, a Zzazzl, you view the world through the multi-faceted eyes of an insect, seeing a dozen or so replications of the screen image (try solving a multi-dimensional, multi-configurable maze from *that* point of view…time to snort Dramamine). The variety of puzzle types range from the aforementioned maze to a corporate business sim with difficulty ranging from medium to sign-the-commitment-papers. Each scenario is likely to take even the most seasoned adventurer between five and 10 hours to complete. Play is mostly non-linear, and the stories may be exited at any time to return to main core of the action, the bar itself.

All in all, you should expect at *least* 80-100 hours of gameplay…and that's if you're a well-worn, inspired, dedicated, doesn't-have-a-life game addict. Others should perhaps set aside the better part of, say, *autumn* to finish this baby. Players new to adventuring should play a few previous Meretzky titles and only then *may* be qualified to give this one a shot.

The BAGEL, Boffo's game engine scrolls smoothly through its 360° transitions; the characters and interiors sport millions of nicely modeled polygons. The quirky aliens *look* great, but animations suffer from repetitive, uninspired movement and no lip-sync (if the character *has* lips). It's a matter of *style*, actually, but you'll find yourself wishing that more time had gone into character animation and sound balance. Voice acting is a bit on the uneven side, but most performances hold up well, especially that of Thud, whom we

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can vote Most Lovable Moron of 1997. Many actions trigger a vocal response from Alias, which makes us *expect* this result when we choose an activity. During beta testing (after sound recording) a *lot* of initially unscripted dialog was added and relegated to text boxes. Some of the text responses integrate well with the action, but many do not, leaving us wondering why Alias *just* responded vocally and now is silent, while the text-narrator-in-a-box gives us parallel information. This phenomenon hurts the consistency of form necessary for seamless progression through the story.

Die-hard adventurers and brave others should ignore the nit-picking and rush out to buy *The Space Bar* (and leave The Tab Key alone). It's a puzzle parfait from heaven. But be sure to pick up pencils, pads and perhaps a few sheets of graph paper, these and your analgesic of choice. Take two *before* the Zzazzl flashback. Trust me. *–Cindy Yans*

The Arrival

Live Interactive

Windows 95

★★☆☆☆

The Arrival is yet another alien invasion sci-fi scenario, this time based on (though not replicating) the story for the movie of the same name. We've been here before, in more interesting and playable ways.

Technically, adventure games are relatively simple to design. It's surprising, then, that this one ships with so many minor but potentially show-stopping glitches. Install, save game and video card problems surfaced on a number of our machines during review, all correctable but likely to make the game return-for-refund fodder for many players.

Game design issues also need further thought here; while much of the game plays quite nicely, borrowing interface and puzzle ideas from Trilobyte, and working with a kind of semi-3D rendered environment (animations are used to move from room to room; once in a room, the player can rotate 360° and look up and down, within limits), the kinds of gotchas guaranteed to kill enjoyment of an adventure game surface frequently. While solution of the various puzzles is optional, for instance (again, imitating Trilobyte's system of solving the puzzle for you if you don't want to keep trying past a certain point), discovery of the necessary items to get past certain areas is sometimes unintuitive and difficult. The layout of the space stations is logical enough to retain in memory during play (no mean feat for this kind of game), but the placing of and conception of objects is inconsistent. There's nothing in the story to suggest why certain things are where they are, and more importantly, all too frequently you'll discover you need items from a long ways back in the game which you didn't find even after careful exploration the first time around (especially a problem with excessive CD-swapping at certain points during play).

All told, *The Arrival* makes a good, professional attempt at a kind of game that's difficult to do well; the technology is superb, but the game play needs work. *–Steve Wartofsky*

Golden Gate

Panasonic Interactive Media

Windows 95, Macintosh

★★★½☆

San Francisco, one of the world's most beautiful and richly historic cities, has never been *more* beautiful than we see it in this surprising little gem of an adventure from IX Entertainment. You are *you* (always my favorite concept) and become embroiled in the hunt for an ancient treasure rooted in medieval Caledon. The story of the treasure of King William is linked to several continents and eventually culminates in the area that is now San Francisco. Your investigation turns up clues and documents all of which piece together links to the whereabouts of this treasure, and to the conspiracy, murder and madness that surround it.

The game's impeccably stunning graphics alone are reason enough to purchase this product. You explore the city and nearby Angel Island (alas, we never encounter Alcatraz), wandering through what feels like a surreal painting. Indeed all of the backgrounds have been crafted from actual photographs that have been water-color enhanced, and the effect is nothing short of superb. The buildings, land and seascapes, wooded byways and countless detailed close-ups are never bland, never tiresome. In fact, their beauty saves the day quite often, because wander you will, sometimes endlessly, trying to find that obscure clue without which your progress is thwarted.

The game's very-*Myst*-like experience is a bit strange when it takes place in what we know is a populated city of the nineties. We accept the barrenness of *Myst* because it's Myst Island... who knows what to expect? But a barren San Francisco? Ambient sounds of occasional inhabitants help a bit, but don't solve this particular dilemma. Oh, there are flashbacks of characters from the past, and a particularly annoying chap named Jake who appears from time to time, but it's still a disturbing stretch of the imagination to be investigating a painting.

The puzzles are a mixed bag – from downright simplistic (a 3 by 3 Magic Square) to quite challenging. There are only 9 or 10 of them, and the real challenge is sniffing out their locations and the clues to their solutions, many of which may be overlooked in the very detailed gamescape.

Warning. The gameplay and exposition are initially *extremely* slow, but patience pays off as the intrigue and inventory build. Full motion video flashbacks and ol' FMV Jake don't integrate well with the rest of the artwork, but some vintage video clips and the musical score are very engaging. This is an above average title – a diamond-in-the-rough – with some of the best artwork you're likely to encounter. If you're at all entranced by the ambiance of San Francisco, it's a must-have. *–Cindy Yans*

Top to bottom:
Yoda Stories, Golden Gate,
The Arrival

Yoda Stories

LucasArts

Windows 95

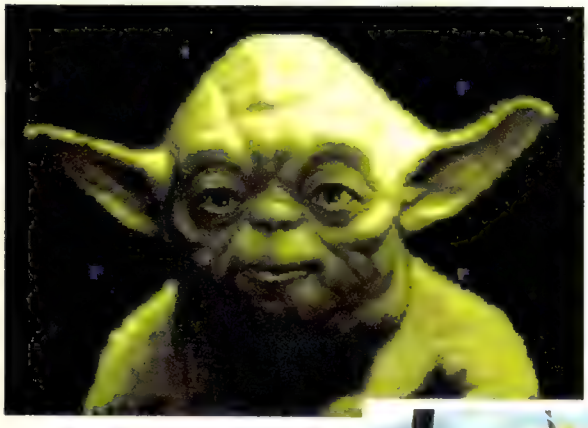
★★★☆☆

Has it ever dawned on anyone that maybe, just maybe, the gargantuan power of The Force *isn't* harnessed by a furrow-browed, swamp slurping, sarcastic green-tinged

muppet? Naturally, I wouldn't say this to Yoda's face, mind you, but.....

Viewing *Yoda Stories*, the newest release from the Jedi Masters at LucasArts, one could liken its style of play to "*Dark Forces* meets *Chip's Challenge*." With no two games alike, *Yoda Stories* touts "billions of possible games" for endless entertainment. Truth be told, a few trips around this galaxy and you've seen more than enough to jump to hyperspace.

Not that there isn't quite a bit to do in every new game, however. Players control the legendary Luke Skywalker as he scurries back and forth around different planets like Dagobah and Tattooine. Whatever random quest Yoda determines to be most galactically correct that day, well, that's what you're assigned for busy work.



Yoda Stories

Visually, your heroes from the Star Wars saga sport disproportionate heads to their minuscule bodies ("Darth, you've got such a big.... helmet."). As simple a trick as it is, it sets the mindset that this game focuses on pure, quick fun.

Along the way, there's the complimentary gun, explosive devices, stale salted peanuts, and keys. Naturally, Luke always packs his lightsaber (which needs fresh batteries, judging from its weakness in combat.)

The random quests typify the perennial bucket brigade style of "deliver Han a candied gerbil to receive the Talisman of Vader's Virility, which in turn opens the portal to Leia's private sauna, etc."

Perhaps the dark influence of the Emperor still wields its awesome power from the grave, but there's an autonomic reaction to *Yoda Stories* that compels gamers to play mindlessly 'til Chewbacca gets a crew cut. It's less than $20. It's fun. It's got the allure of Yoda's sex appeal ("Do me, or do not. There is no try.") As Picard would say, "Make it so."–*Tim Royal*

Pirates: Captain's Quest

Discovery Channel Multimedia

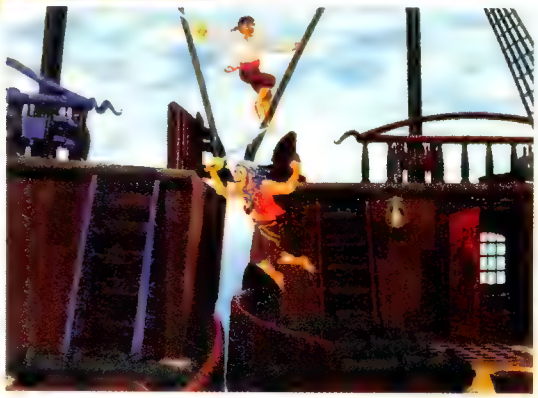
Windows, Macintosh

★★★½☆

So, yez wanna be a pirrrrrate, does yez? Harrr! Then step past the fo'csle up to the mains'le and takes yez a closer look, lads and lassies. I is one, but I wuz not alwez. Onc't I wuz jist like yez swabs. Ig'nerant.

But then I played *Pirates: Captain Quest*, and quickly became as erudite in my knowledge of seamanship and the islands of the Caribbean as a college professor. Not only is it entertaining (and what could be more entertaining than playing a pirate) it's educational, too! Did you know that only new iron cannons could be used in battle? Yep, older cannons overheated and blew apart.

Each quest, besides requiring player characters (the game offers a choice of male or female) to plunder or sink a number of ships and gather a large amount of gold, also requires them to discover one new historical fact such as how Dutchman Peter Stuyvesant lost his leg in battle. Sailing the ship to the fact's historical location discovers the fact.



Pirates: Captain's Quest

Thomas A. Porter, publisher of Discovery Channel Multimedia says, "Kids will love sailing the Caribbean, meeting famous pirates, trading supplies, swordfighting, battling at sea and amassing their fortune." Well, Thomas, we so-called adults love doing those things, too, and it's been too long since we've played the old Commodore 64 version of *Pirates! Pirates: Captain's Quest* is a brilliant replacement, updating the game play, primitive graphics and sounds of the former.

It's not the same game, (although enough of a look alike to be blood-related). It's a more simplified version, perhaps oversimplified for some adult tastes. Even so, it's much more fun to play than Microprose's encumbered and buggy upgrade called *Pirates Gold*. *Put* that *in yer grog and drink it while they hangs me from the yardarm!* –*Andy Backer*

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Diablo

Part Two: through hell and high water on battle.net

Playing multi-player *Diablo* after having finished the solo version is like walking on dry land and then walking at sea; it involves the same skills and body parts, but feels like an entirely different activity. When walking at sea one must learn to adapt to the varying pitch and roll of the ship, one should never take the next step for granted. In the same manner going onto *battlenet* and surviving the dungeon requires that players grow accustomed to the unpredictable lag between their actions and the results.

Baby steps, Bob

In an episode of M*A*S*H* the party is lost and Frank finds a walky-talky and sends their position to a jet flying overhead reporting that the jet is directly over them when he says "Now." Hawkeye derides him saying that by the time Frank said "Now" the pilot was in the officers' lounge having a cold one. In a similar vein players will have to get used to anticipating rather than reacting to what's going on around them.

For instance, your big tough warrior strides into a room full of monsters confident that your armor and heal potions will get you through only to die as your hit points suddenly disappear before you could use a full heal potion. I quickly learned to use a potion whenever my health dropped below half even when I thought I could make it. I also started withdrawing from action when my health dropped below two-thirds to cast heal on myself.

Don't rush into areas that haven't been cleared of monsters. Instead, take short walks of one or two character lengths so that you won't trigger a whole host of monsters. This way only one or two should peel off and you won't be inundated.

I recommend using regular heal and mana potions instead of their fuller brethren. I found it hard to make myself use the full potions even when I knew I should because I didn't want to waste them. After switching to regular potions that mental hesitation went away and I also started withdrawing from combat to heal rather than staying in too long.

Things to wear and carry

I will also venture this controversial hypothesis for warriors. Life-stealing is the best ability to have on a weapon in multi-player. After much experimentation with weapons (and much dying, most of it mine) of haste and massive damage I found that the relatively

The lowly Shadowhawk. Given how rarely a life-stealing weapon shows up Diablo's creators must think this trait is valuable also.

Staves like this can keep a warrior or rogue casting with the big boys for a while, though it takes up a lot of space.

puny Shadowhawk (unique item: +5% resist all, +15% to hit, -20% light, 5% life-steal, 4-12 damage) kept me alive a great deal longer than hasted or king's blades.

While many other weapons will do more damage, every time a successful hit is made my character heals. In fact, using Shadowhawk I very seldom have to use a heal potion in combat, even when surrounded by steel lords, blood knights, etc. To complement that strategy, I also believe that armor that reduces the damage done by opponents is of greater importance than is commonly thought.

Players of whatever class would do well to secure a ring, amulet or helm of harmony. Items of harmony give players the fastest recovery from being hit and keep sorcerers from loosing their spells to a lucky shot. Since you are always a beat (or more) behind due to lag you need to be sure that spells get off and mana isn't wasted casting twice or more to be sure a spell goes off.

Battle is confusing, so warriors should expect to get hit by the odd lightning bolt or arrow, but sorcerers should be careful about throwing mass damage spells such as fireball, chain lightening and especially flame wave. In a full party it is more useful (and much less painful.) to cast stone curse and let the warriors and rogues have a "rap" session, reducing their rigid opponents to their component parts.

Another painful adjustment is the lack of space to store items. While playing on *battle.net* you should never put something on the ground that you can't afford to lose. People frequently "time out" when their system has become too out of sync with the host and may not be able to get back in the game or the items may just disappear.

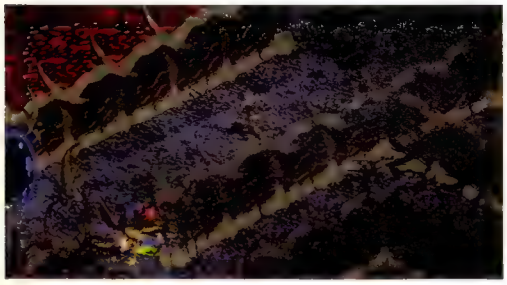
Keep at least one good weapon as a back-up. When you die you lose everything you had equipped — even rings and amulets — and will have to go back down with whatever you have in your backpack unless a buddy can resurrect you.

Gold is almost worthless and only takes up space so you don't need to hang onto much from one session to the next. It's easy to acquire 20k and more in an hour's time. In this case, gold is perfectly OK to leave lying around in town since you can always get more.

Be careful with whom you play and trade. There are a lot of childish minds running loose on battle.net so you might want to consider joining a guild. I had a great time playing with gamers from CompuServe and never had a bad experience with them. Good players are extremely generous and will give lower level/less-well-equipped characters expensive items. It doesn't make much sense to be stingy since you will be agonizing over what few items to keep most of the time.

Keep a selection of jewelry on hand. With two rings and an amulet you can radically alter your character's abilities. I keep a high-magic set for reading spell books (giving my warrior a magic of 138), several that enhance resistance for those trips to the caves and hell, and a set for general use when dealing with mostly non-magic using areas that increase my AC and to hit bonuses allowing my weapon and armor choices to

Bosses like these make shopping fun. In this trip I snagged a bow of the heavens and a helm of harmony, plus other things I sold



Keeping a portal handy for when times get rough can make the difference between losing everything and coming out on top

be based more on how they enhance my combat abilities rather than needing them to add to my resistance.

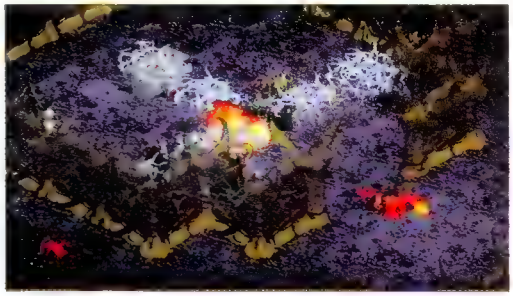
If you're a warrior, you may want to pick up a staff of flame wave or a good bow for use on magic-throwers so that you don't have to hunt them down or totally withdraw to let the rogues and sorcerers takeover.

Out in the fray

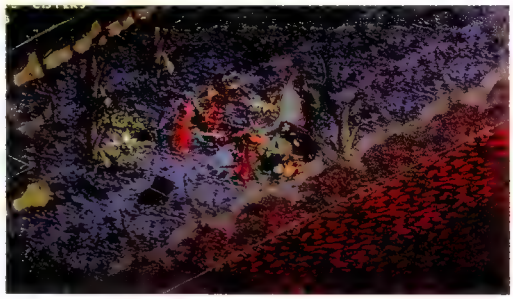
Since the 1.02 patch has come out for Diablo, cheating has cooled down, but there is still one program that will let you backup your character. You can get this utility from the programmer's page at www.users.lith.com/~kevin/diablo/. The newest version works even after the patch. Given the increase in lag time after the patch, this program is essential to those who do not wish to watch 100s of hour's playing time go down the drain in a crash or who need to move their characters from one system or hard drive to another.

If you're just starting out, you may want to try doing multi-player *Diablo* solo. Yes you can start a direct connect game without having another computer connected and have all the fun of playing at the higher difficulty settings without worrying about lags or crashes. Don't jump in too far though. Without anyone to back you up it is all-too-easy to wind up in over your head and dead. Going back to fetch your choice equipment nearly naked is an acquired taste, but for those who have to should try the following: Always cast a portal when first entering a level, especially the caves. You can then make a dash from the portal to the stairs up (or vice-versa) grabbing an item at a time. This is called streaking and it helps to have almost nothing in your inventory so you won't waste time (and get clobbered) trying to deal with your inventory screen while being chased by Hell's third army.

If you want money and are at level 20 or higher start a nightmare game and do the fist four levels. You can easily rake in 15k or more while not having to worry much about death. For those wishing to get the most chances at choice magical items try running on down to level 15 and ignore the other levels. There are guaranteed to be five bosses (four plus Lazarus) each of which will have one magical item. While they are not always that good, this is the highest concentration of bosses in the game. Another technique is to keep starting new games until Griswold has something you want and then go down and get the gold to pay for it. Gris doesn't rotate his inventory unless you go up a level and then he only changes one item. You can also take that mass of cash you will accumulate and buy his cheap items and selling them back until a choice tidbit makes an appearance.

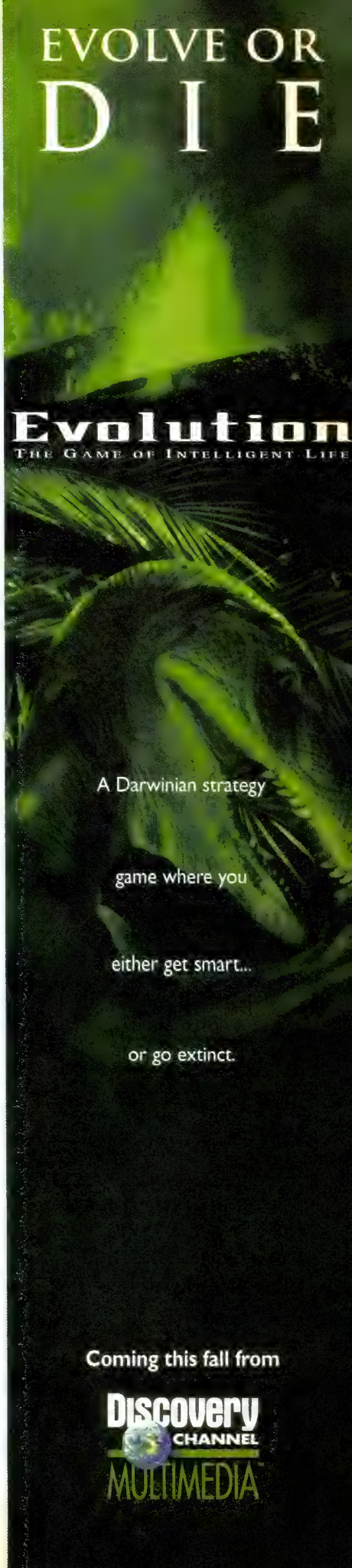


Lazarus' lair is a favorite stomping ground for those seeking treasure. So many bosses guarantee a good haul



As you can see even in this small melee it can be difficult to tell friend from foe so sorcerers shouldn't be above taking a few whacks themselves

On the whole, multi-player *Diablo* is an order of magnitude more difficult than solo *Diablo* and with each level of difficulty (nightmare and hell) continues the trend. As much fun as it is playing *Diablo* solo I cherish the time I've spent with my friends in the dungeon wreaking havoc. –*Samuel Brown Baker II*



The Hangar

I'll have a smooth one, please

With the recent 1.2 (and 1.2a – the latter for backwards compatibility with .TRK files) *Su-27* patch from SSI, what's been brought home yet again is how utterly important smooth frame rate is for any game out there, especially any simulation. While the original design, without any texture mapping, flew smoothly on everything from a 486 on up, with Pentium-based computers there was a periodic, brief halt to the animation, small enough to be only ambiguously noticeable to some, but visible enough to be distracting for many during play. The new patch removes that "stutter" in the graphics performance, and that alone makes an *amazing* difference in the way *Su-27* now feels. Let's just hope that with *Su-27* version 1.5 and *Su-27 2.0* (or whatever the next simulation from SSI may end up being) the commitment to smoothness is maintained.

Smoothness is, surprisingly, a complex quality in a 3D design; you can have something that updates smoothly but – because of the one-to-one analog between mouse or joystick movement and performance on-screen – feels dead in the water, no matter how rapid the graphics updating, simply because there's no sense of inertia present in the movement. Smoothness in a 3D environment trying to be realistic has to be accompanied by other kinds of subtle visual and control-input-to-reaction-time lag techniques to make the 3D movement interesting. It's amazing how often this simple fact is missed, even in a sophisticated simulation working hard to match up with real-world performance numbers. And it's not a question of sufficient hardware to accomplish such a task, either; it was achieved in Dynamix' *Aces Over* series way back in the days of the 386, and even earlier with *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, the classic from Electronic Arts.

Su-27 1.2a achieves smoothness not only because of the frame rate (and now, finally, the removal of the infamous Pentium Stutter) but because the designers of the software took into account the same things the designers of *Doom*, *Quake*, *Duke Nukem 3D Indy Car 500* and *Tomb Raider* paid attention to: how does a real-world person, aircraft, car, etc. actually move? What does that movement feel like? What kinds of cues occur which tell the person they're experiencing a kind of movement appropriate for the object being represented? Create a first-person (or third-person) shooter that drives like a car and you'll have gamers grumbling in no time. Create a flight sim with no apparent visual or control-input inertial reaction – even if that's what the real aircraft supposedly feels like – and players will consider it unrealistic, no matter how well the numbers match up. If a game or sim has "it," you know it right off; ditto if it doesn't. There's nothing really in between.

The problem is, you can't give a player the actual *physical* cues present when actual movement is taking place when you're in a PC on-screen environment. So visual cues have to suffice, and in fact may need to be exaggerated to make up for the absence of physical cues.

Surprisingly enough, this same logic applies to little 3D animated objects in a two-thirds overhead perspective real-time strategy game as much as it does in a first or third-person action game. Not many have really discussed the "smoothness" of the animation when playing in *Command & Conquer Clone* mode (I would actually call it *Populous* mode, since I think that's the first title to accomplish real-time strategy, but that's old history…), but you can bet it probably has a lot to do with the success or failure of such games.

Which is the long, elaborate lead-in to the most important point of this month's Hangar: assuming flight sims are getting to the level of sophistication where we'll be able to take realistic, 3D smoothness for granted from the cockpit perspective, and assuming also that real-time tactics and strategy from an overhead map perspective are going to come more and more into the playing process as the genre evolves, it's probably not too early to suggest that the smoothness, and full, realistic 3D representation of objects from the map perspective will be a potentially huge plus for sim fans looking for this kind of combination simulation/real-time strategy game to emerge. I can hear designers screaming now: "What, you want *Quake*-like animation in the air *and* on the map?! We'll die!" Well, consider it a challenge. Take a close look at *Flying Nightmares 2* when it arrives. Crunch Out. –*Steve Wartofsky*

[1] F22 Lightning II looks better, but doesn't have the real-world 3D feel Su-27 does [2] With the Su-27 1.2a update, this is now the smoothest bird on the planet [3] It may seem a little thing, but realistic 3D performance improves performance accuracy during missions dramatically

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Air Combat Advisor

Part One: Making the BnZ work

[1] As you Zoom away, you'll reach a point where the smallest object shape swaps out to what eventually becomes a pixel sized dot. While it does give you some indication of seperation distance, for Zooms, it isn't much help

[2] In sims like Air Warrior II, figuring the distances is as simple as reading the numbers next to the appropriate icons. Unfortunately, most sims leave you to figure this out yourself

[3] The way the illusion of distance generally works is at certain predetermined ranges; objects will swap out for the next appropriate object size. As you increase your separation, smaller and smaller objects will successively swap in

Now that we've discussed the basic concepts that encompass the BnZ (Boom and Zoom), let's talk about how to put it to work in sims. But before we move on to that, I think a few words about the limitations of simulations are in order. Now I don't want to go too far off on a tangent, so let's keep this focused on how these limitations relate to the BnZ.

Near or far

Without regards to spatial positioning (the physical positioning in relation to yourself, e.g. 3 o'clock, high) and relative positioning (offensive/defensive postures e.g. H2H, H2T, etc.), the ability to judge the separation (distance) between your aircraft and your target (in our particular discussions– enemy aircraft) is critical for marksmanship and maneuvering success.

As we've discussed some time ago, the use of a gunsight as a reference can help you estimate separation distances reasonably well. From the size of your target in relation to something known (such as the gunsight in this example, and only if you've taken the time to learn what the size relationships look like), you can be reasonably accurate. Naturally, your "rule of thumb" accuracy rests with your ability to recall these size relationships, and how many shapes the sim developer settled on including in the sim.

The way the illusion of distance generally works is like this: to pick a random example, say there are 15 groups of object sizes (all which include sides, top, bottom, etc.) for your enemy aircraft. At certain predetermined (although we're beginning to see user determined options) ranges, these objects will swap out for the next appropriate object size. For example, at 800 yards separation you'll see small shape #3, and at 700 yards it'll swap out to the next larger shape. As your separation dwindles, successively larger shapes swap in.

Runnin' for so long

This relative size method works reasonably well for TnB dogfighting (where your separation distances remain relatively close), but with regards to the BnZ (and by no means limited only to this tactic) in simulations, we run into some problems. This is due to hardware limitations, in particular, current video technology. Today, one of the most difficult aspects to model in any sim is the ability to recreate long range depth perception (it's a difficult skill in real life as well).

In our illustration above, as you increase your separation (as in the Zoom), you reach a point where the smallest object shape swaps out to what eventually becomes a pixel-sized dot. Anything beyond that range simply disappears off your monitor screen. Because the Zoom deals with separation distances that run into this realm of "dot" sized opponents, it makes judging when to perform your reversal somewhat of an art. However, never fear, there are ways to deal with this situation. Since we're dealing with sims, we'll use what we have at our disposal (perhaps another day we'll get into the realism vs. sim debate).

Don't stand so close to me

We stated that a reversal should be performed at a distance which will allow you to make the turn and not have the enemy in your face before you can line up another run (approximately 2,500 - 3,000 yards). In sims like *Air Warrior II*, figuring the distances out is simple, because the icons list them (however, when flying online, you may need to subtract 100-200 yards to compensate for network latency). Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on where you stand on the sim purist line), there are other ways to determine separation distances even if the information isn't readily presented to you.

Count out

In no particular order, the first method is the counting method. After you merge, begin counting and make your reversal when you reach a specific number. Of course, to complicate matters your closure rate (your speed in relation to your enemies speed), relative angles (is the enemy already turning to get a tail shot at you?), the enemy aircraft's relative performance, pilot skill, and E state will all affect the number you'll want to count to. The basic rule of thumb is, the faster you're going, the less counting you'll need to do, and the lower the relative angle of the enemy, the further you'll need to zoom. Finally, with each successive run, the count will increase.

It ain't over 'til it's over

I know you're saying "well, a lot of good *that* is!" Unfortunately we're out of space again. We'll discuss how to arrive at a good Zoom count and other ways to calculate your BnZ extension next time.

Until then, remember - the important things are always simple, and the simple things are always hard. Don't reverse too early, and don't fire at "dots." *–Ben Chiu*

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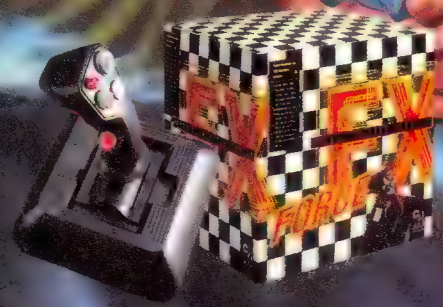

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A worthy successor

iM1A2 Abrams

Interactive Magic

Windows 95

★★★½☆

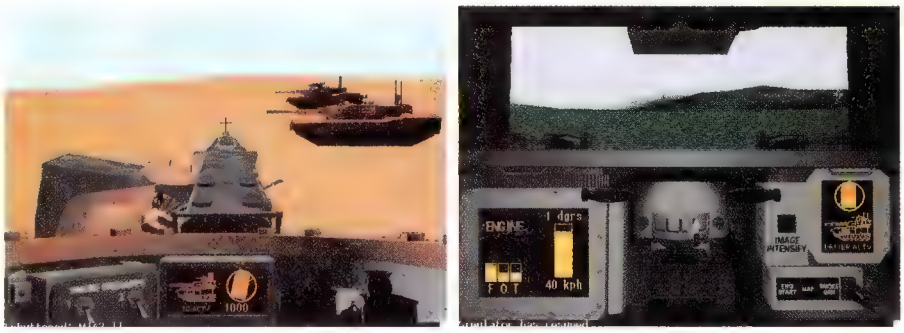
In the world of combat simulations, flight games have reigned supreme. Choose your era, choose your plane, you can probably find a simulation of it. Ground pounders, however, have had pretty slim pickings; more recent titles have been weak, or haven't met the expectations of the hardcore sim crowd, so pretty much the only title to fill the void is the now-ancient but still loved *M1 Tank Platoon* from MicroProse–at least until now, with the release of *iM1A2 Abrams* from Interactive Magic.

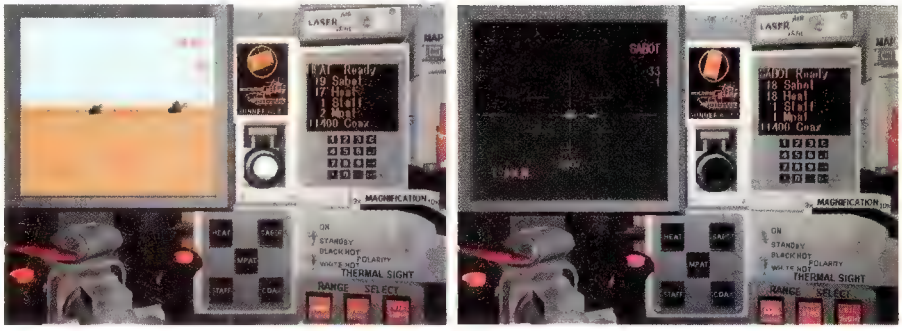
Graphics in the game range from okay to quite nice. While the texturing of the desert seems very good, the Bosnian and Ukrainian regions are too uniform (looking somewhat like green sand instead of grass, fields, or roads); you also often get visual "glitches," and with detail cranked, some complain about the frame rate. No significant vegetation hurts the game in the Bosnian missions, where such cover would play an important tactical role, but Interactive Magic found that it hurt the frame rate even more and chose to take the hit on "realism" in this one region instead. Those criticisms aside, the game does an outstanding job representing the shifting, rolling nature of terrain–even in the "flat" desert–that's so important to a tank sim.

The models of the various vehicles are very nicely done, and major elements (turrets, main guns) are articulated. Aside from a "kill" they don't show damage, but at the ranges typically experienced in the game this isn't such a problem. The tank interiors are clean and crisp; not too flashy, but flash would only obscure the interface.

Visuals aside, the *game* is the important thing, and with a major exception, *Abrams* does a very good job on this point. The exception comes up front, when first learning the game. While there is a "QuickStart" option, there's no tutorial, nor is there any "training area" or gunnery range like *M1 Tank Platoon* had. This–combined with a sometimes awkward interface which seems to hearken back to the days of DOS–can make for an awfully steep learning curve for newbies to the world of tank combat, or to those of us who haven't visited in years.

Though steep, the learning curve is fortunately also very short; once past it you find yourself blasting away with the best of them; then the fun begins. The game models three of the four positions in the Abrams: driver, gunner, and tank commander (both buttoned and unbuttoned). Driver is used the least, but quite a bit of time will be spent in gunner or commander positions. *Abrams* doesn't model every button or switch, but instead focuses on the systems most important for combat. One function I wish had been modeled is the commander's over-ride control of the turret, but this can be simulated via a quick jump to the gunner's position.





Clockwise from top left: The unbuttoned view is useful for scoping out the terrain; The driver position is probably the least used; The gunner's position by night...; ...and by day

While I've not had the chance to test-drive a real Abrams in battle, the combat in the game *feels* right overall. Thermal imaging, the scramble to stay hull down, and more exist in the game; I even observed guided missile fire from a BMP going astray when I, in panic, fired off an un-aimed shot in its direction (luckily, they panicked too). Some things, however, are missing: there are no mines or engineering obstructions, tanks don't throw their tracks or appear to break down except when damaged by fire, and, if you drive off a cliff, you don't suffer destruction (while the reason for this design decision is understanable, it should have been a realism option in the setup).

In addition to QuickStart you can fight individual missions or campaigns. Campaigns can be played from either "Lieutenant" or "Captain" mode; in the former, you control just the tanks in your platoon and maybe a scout element; in the latter you get to control all the extra vehicles a company commander might. Ironically, Captain mode seems easier, despite the extra units, largely because a Captain is more likely to be offered air power (Apaches or A-10s).

The computer opponent can be set to different levels: Green, Regular, Veteran, or Elite. It's hard to tell how much of the increasing difficulty is due to the AI (which sometimes does very well, and sometimes doesn't) and how much is due to the presence of more and better enemy equipment (especially air power; you learn to fear the Hind helicopter, and feel a special sense of victory when taking one out with an MPAT round), but no matter what, the challenge does ramp up considerably. The AI of your troops is also mixed; I wish there had been a command to "assume hull down," as they don't appear to do so automatically.

Overall, I have enjoyed *Abrams*. The manual is quite good and the game supports multiplayer (either co-operative or head-to-head over LAN, direct connect or modem, although Internet play is not officially supported and you can't team up to control different positions within a tank). *Abrams* is more than just the spiritual successor to *M1 Tank Platoon*; with Arnold Hendrick closely tied to the design of both products, it's no surprise that there's a strong "family resemblance" between them. While there are a few points where *Abrams* falls down, it generally equals or excels the classic. It is definitely not *Tank Doom*, so if you're looking for heavy eye-candy and loads of destruction, skip it; as a mid- to high-level sim it does much better–with some exceptions–and (most importantly) is a lot of fun to play. *–Scott Udell*

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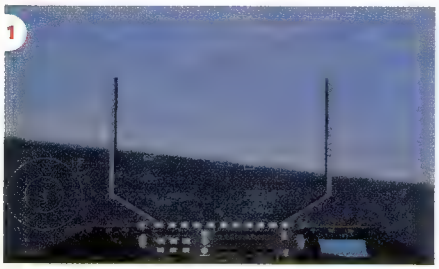
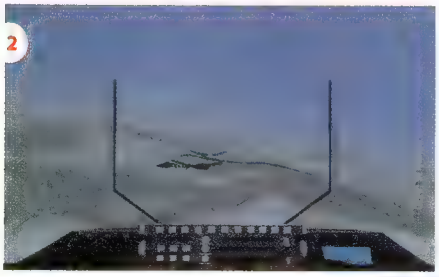
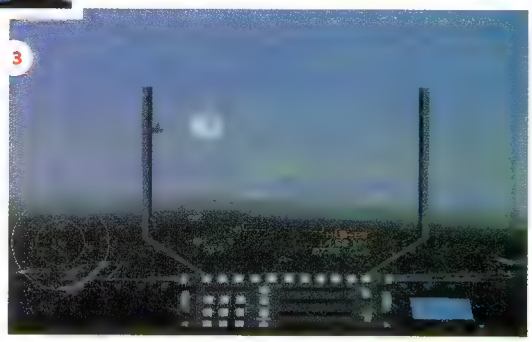
Jetfighter 3

Joy for would-be 21st-century jet jockeys

Winging through the skies of South America and Cuba in a F-22N trying to solve world problems with the UN Rapid Deployment Force is a tough job, but someone has to do it. Whether you are taking on MiGs over the Andes or destroying a hidden nuclear reactor in the Antarctic, there are many things you can do to complete these missions successfully. Following are some general tips on improving the odds in surviving and some hints on some of the many missions in the game.







[1] Targeting a battleship with a maverick. Note the SAM trails in the sky
[2] Engaging a SU-27 over the Andes. The radar screen range has been lowered to 5 miles, making it easier to keep track of the target. The aspect angle indicator in the center of the HUD is pointing down showing that you are right on enemies tail
[3] Targeting a MiG-29 under the light of a full moon. Even though the target is "locked" (the diamond has gone large in the targeting box), the enemy is still out of range. Wait until "In Range" appears on the HUD and then fire

Begin with basics

Trying the 13 training missions is a great way to pick up the intricacies of this sim, even for a veteran flight-sim player. Particular effort should be put into carrier landings (Lesson #9), which can be quite difficult when on full realism. Don't be afraid to start with the Landing Ease control set to "Easy." As you become more proficient, switch to "Moderate" and then "Realistic." Use everything that's there. For new aviators, Lessons #4 and #13 (which deal with air-to-air combat) should be practiced thoroughly as well.

Next, it's on to the beautiful isle of Cuba and Operation Hurricane, a 10-mission campaign that is the warm-up for the main campaign to follow. Upon completion of the Cuban campaign, the UNS Peacekeeper will set sail for South America and some heavy fighting in Chile and Argentina.

Staying alive is the only way to fly

Surviving to fight another day is probably the main goal in any flight-sim; in *Jetfighter 3* this is no different. The most important aspect of defensive flying is knowing where everything is located in relation to your plane. Keep an eye on the radar-screen and message display at all times to monitor enemy aircraft and missiles. Generally, it is best to keep the radar screen in a 40-mile range until enemies are detected; then cycle <R> down to smaller ranges to keep a good perspective on the target. After dispatching any close planes or missiles, make sure to switch back to a higher range immediately <Shift-R> to insure no new Su-27s or MiG-29s have sneaked into attack range.

When an enemy surface-to-air missile (SAM) or air-to-air missile (AAM) has been launched, observe it closely on radar screen, cycling down in range if necessary, and make sure that it has targeted your plane. In some cases you'll be able to avoid targeting altogether with some basic maneuvers. If a missile has locked on, wait until it is within a few miles and then release chaff <C> or flares <F> (depending on whether it is a heat-seeking or a radar-guided missile) and make a hard turn or break away from the missile. Another helpful feature of the radar screen is that higher altitude aircraft and missiles will have larger signatures than an object located lower than your craft. This can be very useful when trying to gain an advantage in a dogfight, especially in night missions.

In enemy territory with large concentrations of SAMs, fly as close to the ground as possible; besides enabling you to fly below radar and pass undetected through these sites, you get a great scenic view of the Andes and South American coast. When flying over enemy air-defenses, keep the throttle up near full military power (90-100%) and if anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) is encountered, jog the plane to the left and right quickly to avoid the flak.

When involved in a particularly nasty dogfight it is a good idea to switch to a lower resolution using the <Shift-F9> keys; this will increase the frame rate and make it easier to get a lock on the opponent. Make sure your wingmen are employed regularly, but remember that they are usually only average or poor flyers. Ground targets can be rather difficult for them, so it's a good idea to take care of any critical targets yourself. Be careful when firing a missile when your wingmen is in front of you (where he often "follows"), or you'll toast him. When all else fails and you can't seem to get that one enemy MiG there is always the little undocumented command <Ctrl-X>, which will destroy any air target. Such a kill will not be recorded on the Kill Board, however.

Don't cry for me Argentina

Operation Caged Saint, Argentina's invasion of Chile, is the main campaign in *Jetfighter 3,* with over 60 missions of varying types. This extended story has multiple plot-lines leading to different paths in the campaign. Don't feel that you always have to win a mission, as failure will take you down a different path with a different set of missions. Note that all missions in the campaign may be played as stand-alone instant missions; the more difficult missions may be practiced in this manner outside the campaign structure.

Constricted Airspace (Mission #6.4.4)

In this strike on the airfield at Libertaad you will be joined by Chilean F/A-18s at waypoint #2. Soon after joining up with these fighters, six MiG-29s will intercept your group. The Chilean fighters should engage; have your wingman do the same using the <Alt-G> command after targeting one of the enemy craft. Pick up any strays yourself and proceed afterwards to the target airfield. Use the Mavericks against the pre-assigned Control Tower and Radar Site and follow up with bombs on the hangars. After a successful bombing run head for home, but beware of a few stray Su-27s, which might be out for vengeance.

Nuclear Winter 1 (Mission #6.16.10)

This attack on an uncharted nuclear reactor takes quick reflexes and a good bombing touch. There is very little activity on the way to the site, but once there, be prepared for a little of everything. A group of MiG-29s patrol the area and they should be dispatched first, using missiles to down them as quickly as possible. When the MiG-29s are out of the way, switch to a bombing run and take out the larger targets (the reactor, storage and refining areas). Then switch to Mavericks and take out the smaller targets (the control and extracting area), using your wingman to attack here as well. Be prepared for fierce resistance from the SAM launchers on the military ships. Once all the targets have been destroyed, hit the afterburners before heading for home. Near the Peacekeeper you will encounter a melee between a group of MiG-29s and F/A-18s. If you want to increase your kill count wade in; otherwise, land back on the carrier to complete the mission.

Operation unleash (Mission #6.26.1A)

This is a very tough mission; you need to keep your wingman alive here as long as possible. The first enemy encountered will be an AH-64. Take it out yourself with your cannons and keep your wingman back, as he has a bad habit of being taken out with the nearest AAM. Next, a lone MiG-29 should appear; eradicate him immediately with cannons (conserving missiles is very important in this mission). Three more MiG-29s should appear as you close in on waypoint #3. Have your wingman engage and then get in the mix yourself. After dispatching the MiG-29s keep your planes low, skimming the surface of the ocean to avoid early detection and SAM sites. After reaching waypoint #3, arm your Mavericks (using the <ENTER> key) and target the battle group. More MiG-29s and some Su-27s should then appear; have your wingman start to engage these and fly into range of the group and try and take out the Trinidad and the Mistral; this will eliminate some of the SAM activity. Engage the enemy bogies yourself and have your wingman (when free) fire his Mavericks at the battleship and the destroyer. Use your remaining Mavericks on any targets missed or not initially targeted, then head for home (rah!). Watch for a possible group of four MiG-29s on the return flight near waypoint 5.

Liquid gold (Mission #6.28.1C)

An interception mission, this can be relatively easy as long as you take out the enemies quickly, before they have a chance to take out the purification plant. A group of three Su-27s will appear near waypoint #1. Engage and order your wingman to engage as well. A group of MiG-29s will be encountered near waypoint #2 and a final group of MiG-29s will be seen near waypoints #5 or #6.

Shooting stars (Mission #6.53.35)

This interception mission is a patrol designed to keep an eye on some "missing" cruise missiles. Once over land keep low and out of radar view of the SAM sites. Near waypoint #3 a group of MiG-29s and a cruise missile will show up on the radar. Send your wingman after the MiG-29s and target the cruise missile yourself. Close on the missile and intercept, keeping any eye on the aspect angle indicator and dispatch it with your cannon. Take on any left-over enemy MiG-29s, keeping an eye on the message indicator in case more cruise missiles are launched. Continue on the patrol path making sure the remaining cruise missiles are intercepted before reaching Los Andes.

The above should give you a taste of the tactics characteristic of this involving sim; with a plethora of missions available and two solid campaigns (and more to come), there's plenty to work through in *Jetfighter III*. Enjoy! –*Jim Pedicord*

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Links, your competition has arrived

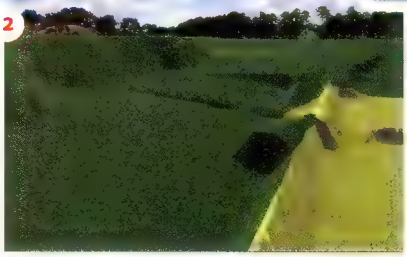
There is one truth that spans the gap between real-world golf and the computer variety: either you love the game or you just don't get what the fuss is all about. And if you love computer golf, then you probably already own *Links LS*. Any company that brings a new product to the market is either going to go toe-to-toe with Access or bring something new to the table. Accolade

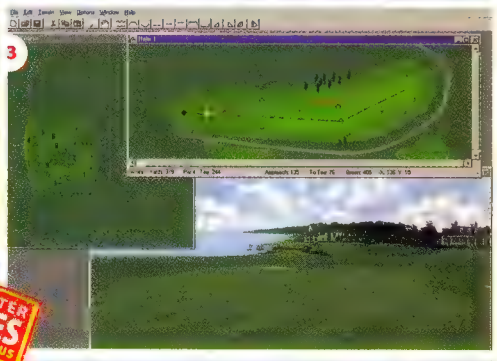
[1] You can simulate those early morning games by adding fog to the first few holes

[2] In the hands of a clutzy reviewer, the course designer can create some horrific landscapes

[3] The course designer showing the working windows and the rendered view

[4] The splendor of Cabo del Sol...and you've got the whole course to yourself





Jack Nicklaus 4 ★★★★½
Accolade Windows 95

chose the latter route with *Jack Nicklaus 4;* they gave us an exceptional course designer. Unlike Maxis, however, who provided a course designer in *SimGolf* but offered weak gameplay and sub-par graphics, Accolade didn't overlook the game in *Jack Nicklaus*.

Granted, it isn't as sim-like as *Links LS*. There is no stance to worry over, no club face options. But you can adjust your aim to fade or hook, loft high or stay low, so the end results are the same without all the minutiae of the *Links LS* engine. You just won't learn why it worked, and thus it will be harder to translate your computer golf game to the real world.

The graphics are wonderful, and the ball physics entirely adequate, though drives don't seem to roll out quite as much as they should. The sound is just OK. Varieties of play styles are offered: stroke, skins, match and sudden death. You can play against recorded golfers, or find an opponent on a LAN or over the net. There are 'certified game' options available for tournaments. Hitting the ball is accomplished via the now familiar three-click swing meter.

In fact, the only weakness in the game engine is in the number of views. If you like to play computer golf with first person, overhead, pin, and profile windows open all at once, you'll be disappointed to learn that *Jack Nicklaus 4* only allows a profile view and one game view to be open at the same time. The game view can be the traditional behind the golfer shot, or a custom view that allows placing the camera anywhere on the course. Though you can aim in the custom view, you must hit from behind the golfer. Whether this limitation is a critical flaw or of no consequence will depend on your personal preferences and playing style.

Then there is the course designer. This is the first time anyone has combined photo-realistic graphics with an accessible, consumer-level course designer. You can build a course from scratch, use a course wizard (in which you enter yardage and general shape of each hole, then let the program produce a skeleton course for you to enhance) or just import your favorite holes from other courses. The designer is powerful enough to build a very realistic course modeled after the one at the local country club, but easy enough that tossing together an unpolished "fantasy" course is the work of an hour or three.

As is always the case, a good tool does not an artisan make. Creating flat holes is very easy, but getting slopes and height differentials smooth and realistic takes a bit of skill. And adding all the tiny details (cart paths, benches, ball washers) that make a course seem alive takes time. Expect tons of hack courses on the net, and a relatively few quality ones, but the same can be said for *Quake* levels or *Warcraft II* scenarios. Bottom line is, you won't need to take a weekend seminar to learn to use the designer, but some patience and hard work will pay-off in the long run.

Jack Nicklaus 4 is a very playable golf *game*. If you take your golf very seriously, you may find some omissions (the aforementioned stance controls, for instance) annoying, but the vast majority of computer duffers will have a hell of a good time downloading and playing new courses. For wannabe golf course architects, *Jack Nicklaus 4*'s designer makes this package a must have. Finally, someone has put out a product that rivals *Links LS*. *–Peter Smith*

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Beyond the speed of sound

Test driving the Falcon Northwest Mach V 200MHz MMX Pentium

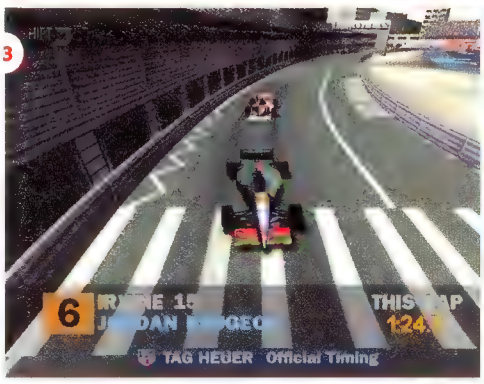
It's that time of year again. Intel has released their MMX Pentium chip, the latest "gotta have it" PC item, and lowered the prices enough to make them affordable (well, relatively speaking). The first generation of MMX games are already on the shelf, so we thought it was a good time to check out an MMX machine.

Enter Falcon Northwest. For a few years, they've been selling "game machines," PC configured with hardware optimized for game performance. We ordered up a 200MHz MMX Pentium with 32MB of RAM, a Diamond Stealth 3D and Monster 3D for video (the Stealth 3D is only used for 2D), a Western Digital 3.2 gigabyte EIDE drive, a Toshiba 12X CD-ROM, and a SoundBlaster 16 PNP with a Yamaha WaveForce DB50XG daughter card.

When buying a machine, you have to look beyond cost (obviously up to a point). Compatibility is infinitely more important, as an extra $50 spent today may save you headaches down the road. As we've commented on before, the real reason to go with the Falcon is its gaming-first approach to design. DOS and Windows 95 video performance determine the cards used in the system, and on the sound front, it doesn't come with a SoundBlaster-compatible card, it has a SoundBlaster. It comes with a CH gamecard for precise joystick control, and for your aural pleasure, our unit shipped with the exceptional Altec Lansing ACS55 Power Gaming System subwoofer/speaker combo with built-in Surround sound.

Overall, this is an excellent machine, albeit one that costs more than an equivalent Gateway or Dell system. For the extra cash, consider you won't have to replace that video card that doesn't like DirectX or that SoundBlaster that doesn't quite work with *Quake*. The systems can be configured with whatever hardware you'd like, and delivery is prompt. About the only negative going with Falcon is that you won't get one of those incredible software bundles that the big boys offer, the ones with every piece of Microsoft software in existence. At least Falcon gives you all of the documenation–not only do they give you a troubleshooting guide, but they also include all of the manufacturer's documentation and drivers for every piece of hardware.

For testing purposes, we ran a mess of MMX and non-MMX software on the machine, and all but one piece of beta software ran without a hitch. That particular game had a problem with the new revision of Windows 95 (the one with the 32-bit FAT), so you can't blame it on the machine. Based on this informal evaluation, compatibility isn't a problem. It also passed the "always install DirectX" test, where you always answer "Yes" to the DirectX question, and the games still work.



[1] Falcon Northwest Mach V
[2] Sega's MMX-only Virtual On
[3] Psygnosis' 3Dfx-only version of F1, in all of its glory
[4] A game like BMG's upcoming Moto Racer GP really shines
[5] Psygnosis' F1

The 3D games that used MMX and/or the 3Dfx card looked stunning. UbiSoft's *Pod* showcased itself as the best-looking race game ever, followed closely by Psygnosis' 3Dfx-only conversion of *F1* and BMG Interactive's *Moto Racer GP*. Sega dropped by our offices and showed off their MMX-only version of *Virtual On*, which is an odd cross between *Doom* and *Virtua Fighter*. Watch out for that guy on level 3–he's a killer.

All of these games benefit from this machine and the ability of the MMX chip to do ultra-fast 16-bit color graphics. The extra colors allow textures to blend together smoothly, eliminating most of the color banding. For those of you who actually do something else with their machines, besides playing games, will be ecstatic to know that Adobe Photoshop 4.0 smokes with MMX (according to Intel, it can do some operations faster than an SGI).

If you're buying a new machine, there's no reason not to buy an MMX machine. But should you buy this particular MMX machine? If money isn't your greatest concern, then go for it–the Mach V is the best game machine on the market. Too bad we have to send ours back. *–Steve Bauman*

Falcon Northwest Mach V • *Falcon Northwest* • *www.falcon-nw.com* • *888.FALCON1* • **Pod** • *UbiSoft* • *Windows 95* • **F1** • *Psygnosis* • *Windows 95* • **Virtual On** • *Sega Windows 95*

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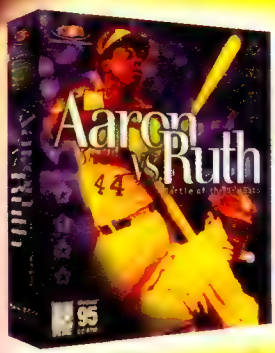

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Letter of the month

After reading Nathan A. Greer's letter in the may 1997 issue, I feel the need to respond to some common misconceptions about Windows 95 (probably started by Microsoft). In his letter, Mr. Greer seems to assume (I say "seems" because it's really hard to tell from his ranting what he's thinking) that all games run better under Windows 95 on all computers. No matter how much Microsoft would like us to believe it, this is only true on a handful of computers, and only with native games (DOS games are always slower under multitasking operating systems). It's possible Mr. Greer has one of these computers, but that doesn't make it true for the rest of us. The vast majority of computers are slightly slower under Win95, even with DirectX. The primary reason for this is also counter to Mr. Greer's other apparent assumption. He seems to assume that Win95 games have lower system requirements. This is not true on any computer. Whether you run a DOS or Win95 native versions of a game, under Win95 the system requirements are usually doubled. A game that runs on a 486DX66 with 8 megs of RAM under DOS usually requires a P90 with 16 megs of RAM under Win95, regardless of it's native operating system. Most game manuals will point this out. This is because GUIs are resource hogs, no matter what operating system you use.

Programmers program for DOS for one simple reason, it's fast. It does one thing at a time and doesn't interrupt it to make sure it's still running. The drawback to DOS is that it's harder to program. Win95 already has alot of the things a game needs built in (namely hardware support). Unfortunately, Win95, or any multitasking OS, has to interrupt the game every once in a while to make sure nothing else needs to use the CPU, even when nothing else is running. Native games are designed for this, but it still hurts performance.

Privateer 2 probably should have lower system requirements considering what it does. But, in the future, Mr. Greer should put the blame for inefficient program design where it belongs, on the programmers, not the OS.

David Jolly
Via Internet

Demos are not the death of games

[*We received a lot of mail about Chris McNair's "Demos are the death of games" letter in CGS+ 76, and all of them disagreed with Mr. McNair. Here's a sampling of one of them. –ed*]

I just got your latest issue in the mail, and read it cover to cover. I just had to respond to the letter titled, "Demos are the death of games." I disagree. Although I am relatively new to computer gaming, I have become addicted to the "brain games", where you work you way through the game by solving puzzles.

I have made some costly mistakes, and learned the hard way, not to spend my money on games that have been extensively advertised, but have no demo available. I have found that if a company has a good game, they are not afraid to let the potential customer take it for a test play. I will only purchase games after I have had a chance to play a demo.

Thank you for the chance to speak my mind. I love the reviews in your magazine.

Jody Aldred
Via Internet

Review kudos

Great job on your *Front Page Sports: Football Pro '97* review (*CHS+ 76*). Other magazines have given way too much praise to this mediocre game. I'm glad to see that there's a magazine out there that has the guts to tell it how it is.

Mark Currie
Via Internet

I read your "hack and slash" review of *Magic The Gathering: Battlemage* (*CGS+ 77*) and found an indirect recommendation to buy *Dark Legions* nestled within. All I can say is: thanks! I had never played it and decided that for $10, it was worth a look. I have already found it to be one of my best purchases in the past three months and not only did I save money on a dreadful game, I found a great one for next to nothing.

Randy Roth
Via Internet

What you said about *Destruction Derby 2* (*CGS+ 76*) was way off. It's just you. I love the game. It's awesome (maybe because I'm an expert at games; I'm only 13, but have been playing games since I was 5), especially with the Matrox Mystique. It's not that hard. It's probably because you just suck.

Daniel Quach
Via Internet

Fish-head, fish-head, eat them up, yum

I'm a fairly new reader and I'd just like to say that this is the best computer gaming magazine that I've read yet. You guys do a real good job of reviewing games and giving good looks at new games. It's so nice not to have to download every demo before I can have a good idea of what the game is like.

By the way I just got done reading the "Angry Angler's" hate mail to you guys in the last issue; "Angler," my man, get a life. What kind of a name is "bubble ass" anyhow?

Isaac Bunn
Via Internet

The angry upgrader

OK, I know you probably won't publish nor will you respond to this letter [*wrong on both counts -ed*], but I will have a lot more respect for your magazine if you show the balls to do so. In "The Perfect Game" [*Upfront, CGS+ 76*], by Steve Wartofsky, he says to "take for granted your game can throw at me as much as the better quality stuff out there can take." He also says "be preferably in Windows 95." Now I'M PISSED! What makes you f#$%^&g people think we all can afford to have 166MHz Pentium processors, 3D cards, Dolby Surround Sound, full dual joystick?

Why, oh, why, are you urging software publishers to keep computer gaming a rich mans sport? Why is it essential that I go out and spend $100.00 for Windows 95, just so I can play a stinkin' game?! Has anyone here ever heard of DOS? As far as I can tell, games on that platform are just as good. Do I smell contribution dollars from Microsoft? *DOS is a Microsoft product too, but if you look in our parking lot, you will see that we all have their new "Microsoft Car" product–too bad it runs NT 4.0 and our gas pump software won't work with it–ed*]

I'm sorry if I raised your blood pressure, but, all too often, more and more games are only playable on top of the line computers, and that isn't fair [*ask Amiga owners if it was fair that the PC sent it to its grave when it was clearly superior at the time*]. Everybody should be able to enjoy the great experience's computers can provide. Not just those who make $50,000 a year. Not just the nerds. EVERYBODY. Next time Mr. Wartofsky writes an article describing what an ideal program should be, maybe he should consider what others have, not just what HE has. That's just downright selfish.

Christopher P. Wido
Via Internet

Point taken, but software publishers have always lived on the bleeding edge–how many people bought a 386 just to play Wing Commander? Statistics seem to show that new computer owners are more likely to buy software then existing users, hence companies make games that take advantage of the latest go-fast doo-dads in order to sell to that market.

At the same time certain users gripe about excessive hardware requirements, the rest complain that the games aren't supporting their 3D accelerator cards. Publishers are damned if they do, and damned if they don't support all of the latest gee-whiz things.

Finally, anyone who complains about having to upgrade their PC to play games should go spend $149 on a Nintendo 64–its internal hardware will never change, and you'll never have to upgrade its operating system. –ed

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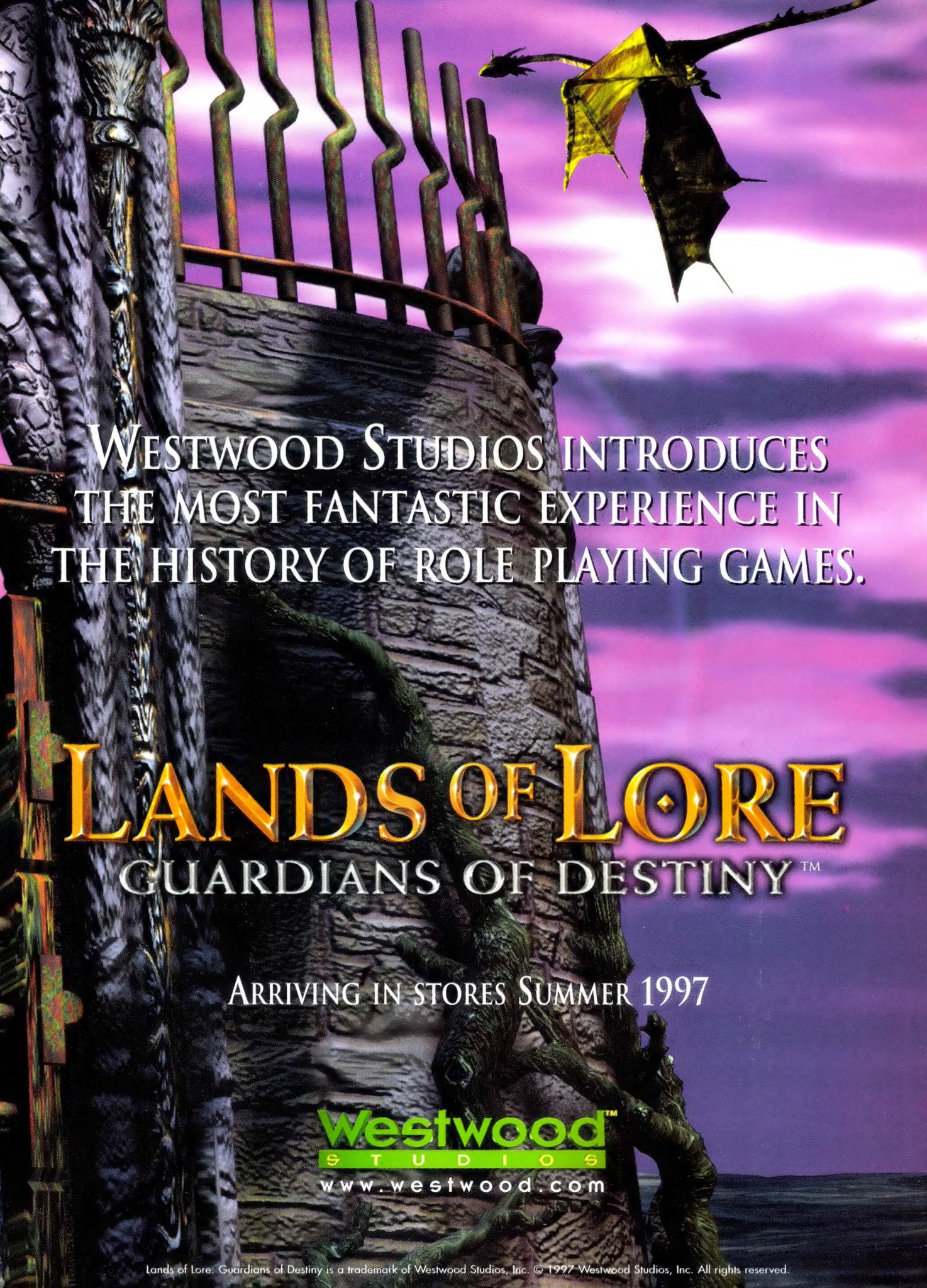

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